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Lived experiences of transgender college students using a preferred name policy

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WHAT'S IN A NAME:

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TRANSGENDER COLLEGE STUDENTS USING A PREFERRED NAME POLICY

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WHAT'S IN A NAME: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TRANSGENDER COLLEGE STUDENTS USING A PREFERRED NAME POLICY

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ABSTRACT

As the visibility of transgender (trans) college students has increased, college policies have also increased for these students to help them persist. One such policy is a preferred name policy that allows students to change their names on non-legal campus records to their chosen name without a legal name change. This narrative research study explored the lived experiences of trans students at an urban public university who used a recently implemented preferred name policy. The results revealed that identity and persistence were shaped by both external factors such as campus support and navigation strategies and internal questions around sense of belonging, mattering, validation, and engagement. All five participants made recommendations to the policy that included updating campus technology, more training for staff and faculty, and better marketing of the policy. This was the first study done that focused solely on a preferred name policy, and it gave a voice to trans college students. Their stories are important for us to preserve because trans college students are often left out of higher education research that focuses on persistence and retention. Persistence to graduation for this population of college students is imperative because of the financial barriers trans individuals often face compared to cisgender individuals.

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INTRODUCTION

"Trans* students are forced to develop skills and strategies for navigating a collegiate environment that continues to be shaped without them in mind." (Nicolazzo, 2017, p. 5).

Nicolazzo's words reveal that trans students are often invisible on college campuses even when it comes to practices and policies that are supposed to formally help these students. Until recently, these students have also been invisible in research focusing on their needs. Empirical studies focusing solely on trans students did not begin until 2005 and have been scarce up until the last decade (Beemyn, 2019a; Lange et al., 2019; Renn, 2010). Trans students historically have had trouble with visibility because colleges rarely offered any formal policies or programming to help them persist and be recognized (Marine, 2017).

In the last decade formal policies have been created with the intent to help trans college students avoid harassment and feel supported on college campuses (Beemyn, 2019a). For example, 250 postsecondary institutions now offer a preferred name change policy for trans students (CampusPride, 2019). The addition of these policies may seem

significant, but thousands of postsecondary institutions still do not offer any policies at all to protect trans students (Beemyn, 2019a). Garvey and Rankin (2015a) believe that colleges and universities have gone too long without supporting trans students, and these institutions are now scrambling to implement policies and procedures. This mad dash to create inclusive policies for trans students has led to a lack of policy assessment after implementation (Catalano, 2015; Goldberg et al., 2018). While policies alone cannot end harassment and discrimination, they may lessen the burden faced by these students on college campuses (Marine, 2017; Pryor, 2015; Seelman, 2019).

To begin this chapter, I will provide an overview of terminology found in this study. I will then expand on the current problem, present my problem statement, and discuss the theoretical frameworks and research questions that will guide my work. I will follow this up by discussing the significance of this study and will conclude with a description of my research design.

Definition of Terms

According to Stryker (2017), transgender "refers to people who move away from the gender they were assigned at birth, people who cross over (*trans-*) the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain that gender" (p. 1; emphasis in original). Staying true to Stryker's (2017) definition of the word *transgender*, my work uses *transgender*, and more specifically *trans* to apply to participants who self-identify as transgender. Variants to transgender such as *trans** and transgender non-conforming (*TGNC)* will appear throughout this research because of the preferences of different scholars. I will primarily be using the term *trans* for this research, which Beemyn (2109a) believes is the most inclusive way to discuss transgender individuals. It is important for

me to make the term *trans* as inclusive as possible within this research, so that my work does not strengthen gender binaries.

When discussing members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer community, I will use the abbreviation of *LGBTQ+* to reflect the wide use of terms that students use for themselves and their experiences. Queer is a term that was previously considered derogatory, but according to Stryker (2017), the term has now been reclaimed as an empowering way to self-describe both sexuality and gender. It is important to note that LGBTQ+ denotes both sexual identity and gender identity. These two concepts should not be viewed as the same thing (Jourian 2015a). To honor the participants in this study, I use the same gender identities and terms that they use to describe themselves. Definitions are important, but it is also important that we allow individuals to describe and label their own identity (Marine & Catalano, 2015).

In this research, I am referring to a preferred name policy that allows students to use their chosen names on campus. There is a distinction between preferred and chosen names. The names the trans students choose are not preferred names, they are their names. Beemyn and Brauer (2015) point out that while the software field in most higher education systems calls for the term *preferred name*, school administrators should use the term *chosen name* for students. They wrote, "While the word *preferred* can be accurate for students who seek to change their name in information systems because they go by a nickname, this usage when applied to trans students often feels trivializing. It is the name and pronouns that they use, not their 'preferred' ones; using any other name or pronouns is inappropriate, just as it would be for nontrans students" (p. 482; emphasis in original).

For this reason, I will refer to the policy using the word *preferred*, but the term *chosen name* when students discuss their names.

Participants in this study use several different terms to discuss their legal names. The most common term is *dead name*. When students use the term dead name, they are referring to the name they were given at birth that they no longer use and do not want other people to use as well. Participants also use the term *passing* in their stories. According to Nicolazzo (2017), "This term refers to the ability to be socially (mis)read as having a particular gender identity" (p. 168). While trans people can see passing to be a goal in their gender transition, it can also be seen as a burden or a privilege.

Background

Trans individuals are four times more likely than cisgender individuals to experience extreme poverty, and are twice as likely to experience unemployment, four times more likely if they are people of color (Grant et al., 2011). Benefits associated with college attendance and degree completion include cognitive gains, higher earnings over a lifetime, increased civic engagement, reduced unemployment, and potentially better health (Marine, 2017; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). For these reasons, persistence to degree completion is imperative for trans college students. Marine (2017) argues that having access to these advantages is critical because this student population has historically been disadvantaged. The disadvantages are exemplified by research revealing that trans students enter college with greater financial concerns and emotional health care needs than the average cisgender college student (Stolzenberg & Hughes, 2017). Even with the barriers they face, more trans students are out on college campuses than ever before (Bilodeau, 2009; Dugan et al., 2012; Wentling, 2019).

College is often cited as the first opportunity trans students have to express their identity (Beemyn, 2003; Bilodeau, 2005; Goldberg & Kuvalanka, 2018; Marine, 2011), but many of these students have trouble feeling safe on college campuses because other students, staff, and faculty can wittingly or unwittingly create a hostile environment due to ignorance or a lack of understanding regarding the experiences of trans students (Bilodeau, 2009; Goldberg, 2019; Pryor, 2015). According to Rankin and Beemyn (2012), "The vast majority of college students, classroom faculty, student affairs educators, and administrators have a tremendous amount to learn about gender diversity" (p. 2). When there is more education and research about trans individuals in the classroom, there are more positive attitudes toward trans individuals (Rye et al., 2008). Research on trans college students is vital if higher education professionals are to understand the needs of this student population and make campuses more inclusive and safe. Bilodeau (2009) asserts that "There is a significant difference between asking what needs are, and studying the experience of students to assess their experience to meet their needs" (p. 132).

In addition to the same personal and financial issues facing many cisgender college students, additional variables can account for why trans students specifically may leave college. Goldberg (2019) revealed that 67% of the trans respondents in a campus climate study reported concerns about physical and emotional safety on campus, and in some instances these concerns led to students altering their appearance on campus or withdrawing from courses. In their 2019 study, Goldberg et al. found that for trans students gender identity stress is amplified by being on a college campus. These stressors can include lack of gender inclusive bathrooms, hostility from students and faculty,

anticipatory anxiety, feelings of isolation on campus, unsupportive family members unwilling to lend support, and financial concerns that come from a lack of resources to cover medical needs. Participants in the Goldberg et al. (2019) study also discussed their inability to use chosen names in the classroom and the increased scrutiny this brought from students and faculty. Chosen names and pronouns validate gender identity and expression (Beemyn & Brauer, 2015). When trans individuals are able to use chosen names, fewer depressive symptoms and less suicidal ideation and behavior are reported by these individuals (Russell et al., 2018).

Problem Statement

As research on trans college students has increased over the past decade, campus-wide policies have also become more responsive to help these students persist and engage on college campuses (Goldberg et al., 2018). One such policy is a preferred name policy that allows students to use chosen names on non-legal campus records (e.g. ID cards and on-line discussion boards) without having to file a legal name change. The focus of this research, Great Lakes State University (GLSU), recently implemented such a policy joining over 250 colleges and universities in the United States that had already done so—most within the past decade (Beemyn, 2019a; Campus Pride, 2019).

Goldberg et al. (2018) found that trans students prioritized the need for gender-inclusive restrooms, nondiscrimination policies that include gender identity/expression, a university recognized LGBTQ+ student organization, and the ability to change one's name on campus records without a legal name change. One-third of the students in the Goldberg et al. (2018) study did not even know if preferred name policies existed on their campuses. The authors noted that recently introduced name change policies were not

publicized well on campuses. Issues with policy articulation have also been discussed in other studies (Beemyn & Brauer, 2015; Goldberg & Kuvalanka, 2018). Because college preferred name change policies are so new, very little research specifically chronicles the experiences of the trans students who use them.

Trans students use a chosen name instead of making a legal name change for several reasons. They may not be able to afford the cost to make a legal name change or their legal guardians may refuse to pay for the change or even accept the student's gender identity (Beemyn & Brauer, 2015). When instructors recognize trans students by using their chosen name and pronouns, it can make a positive difference in the student's academic engagement. According to Wentling (2015), "The recognition of trans* students, including the correct use of pronouns, is supportive of their identity development and fundamental to their personhood. Students who are invited into learning spaces—as their full selves—are more likely to contribute and engage in the curriculum and learning community" (p. 474). When a student's chosen name does not show up when it is expected to appear, it can be detrimental to learning. Pryor (2015) found that students who were denied the opportunity to use chosen names in the classroom would drop courses because they did not feel safe. When misnaming happens in front of a classroom, students can feel alienated, but when faculty respect trans students' chosen names, there is a better chance of positive relationships developing between trans students and faculty (Wentling, 2019).

University structures and university policies impact identity development for trans students. Vacarro et al. (2015) claim that inclusive policies and procedures help students make meaning of who they are based on these contextual factors surrounding them and

found this is true for students with minoritized identities of sexuality and gender (MIoSG). Students in the MIoSG model presented by Vacarro et al. encompass every part of the LGBTQ+ acronym. According to Vacarro et al. (2015), "It is not merely an experience of reciprocal interaction that contributes to an individual's evolving sense of self, but how they process and understand that event in the context of their past and present realities" (p. 35).

For those schools that do offer policies, often that is not enough to help trans students navigate the college campus. Institutions can be encouraged to change policies to promote more inclusive campus climates, yet their solutions often create conditions that reify existing oppressive stereotypes (Brazelton, Renn, & Stewart, 2015). Freire (1970) believes that taking action without understanding why people are oppressed can create further oppression. In the case of trans students, often the oppression comes in the form of cisnormativity where schools show they value cisgender students and binary gender norms. Chang and Letts (2018) wrote, "Practices and policies to support trans students are becoming more prevalent on college and university campuses, but reflections on the process of implementing these practices and policies are rarely documented by college and university administrators. Higher education administrators have yet to truly state an understanding of what, why, and how barriers to trans inclusion happen on campus" (p. xi). The presence of an institutional policy is sometimes used in place of the actual work a university can do to better understand the needs of marginalized students. Ahmed (2012) refers to this as the "ticked box approach" when colleges and universities check off that they have implemented changes without following up on the changes or

making sure the changes are inclusive. This approach prioritizes compliance over compassion (p. 106).

Catalano (2017) asserts that policy recommendations and implementation for trans college students lack empirical research to indicate effectiveness because institutions presume monolithic trans experiences without addressing distinctions in student identity. Very little empirical research has been done on policies that help trans college students after implementation. Previous studies on policy implementation for trans students have primarily focused on residence life policies and gauging students' needs for inclusive policies on college campuses (Garvey et al., 2018; Goldberg et al., 2018; Nicolazzo & Marine, 2015; Seelman, 2014). However, there is a gap in the literature when it comes to research on policy implementation for trans students—especially research focusing on chosen names and identity development for trans students on college campuses that have implemented formalized preferred name policies.

Theoretical Frameworks and Influences

Tinto's (1975, 1993) model of student departure, examining academic and social integration on college campuses was one of the frameworks used in this research. This model evaluates if student identity moves along different stages for trans traditional and nontraditional students depending on support strategies such as a preferred name change policy. This model consists of three stages that help identify if students can be successful and persist toward graduation. The first stage is the separation stage, during which students disassociate themselves from previous communities, such as residences or high school culture. The second stage is the transition to college stage, which represents the passage between old and new. In this stage, Tinto describes students who are

experiencing a sense of loss as no longer strongly bonded to the past, but not yet tied to the future. The student's response to the separation and transition stages helps determine if they will persist in college.

The third stage of Tinto's model emphasizes incorporation, in which students adopt norms that help them establish strong bonds in social and intellectual communities of college life. This cannot occur until the student has successfully navigated the separation and transition stages. If students are unable to incorporate themselves into communities on college campuses, there is a strong chance they will not be successful and will eventually withdraw from college. Transitioning to the incorporation stage requires that students are not only engaged on campus, but also feel a sense of belonging, mattering, and validation in the classroom and in cocurricular activities on campus.

In this study, I reframed Tinto's stages to evaluate how trans students moved through a persistence model using a preferred name policy. My research examined the social and academic life on a college campus before the preferred name change policy was implemented; this represents the separation stage. I then examined how students' experiences changed as they transitioned to their chosen name on campus—the transition stage. Finally, I examined data that provided insight into whether the name change policy helped the students in this study successfully transition into an incorporation stage on campus. Doing so would indicate that they feel comfortable in both academic and social settings on campus, thus increasing their chances of persistence at the institution.

The possible movement from transition stage to incorporation stage was examined using Schlossberg's transition theory (1981, 1989). One of the major components of this theory is the exploration of what Schlossberg refers to as the Four S's: situation, self,

support, and strategies. The Four S's, which can be viewed as both resources and deficits, were identified to examine how participants are able to persist based on the transition of using a preferred name policy (Evans et al., 2010). In this study, *situation* was defined by type of institution and type of student; *self* explored student identity development models as well as gender identity models; *support* looked at types of support trans students receive from college faculty and staff as well as kinship networks; and *strategies* included concepts such as anticipatory management (Wentling, 2019) and resilience (Nicolazzo, 2017; Singh et al., 2012) for trans students.

As the students described how they experienced the policy, I analyzed the Four S's to better understand how or if they were able to persist through the three stages. I also explored the concepts of sense of belonging, mattering, validation, and engagement as they applied to identity and persistence. Together these internal and external concepts helped me understand the participants' overall experiences with the policy and on the GLSU campus. Combining Tinto's and Schlossberg's work made the conceptual framework for this study both sociological and psychological. In chapter two, I will revisit Tinto's and Schlossberg's theories more fully.

Purpose

The purpose of this narrative research study was to explore the lived experiences of trans students using a preferred name change policy recently implemented at an urban public university in the Midwest, Great Lakes State University (GLSU) with specific emphasis on identity and meaning making for these students. According to Haverkamp and Young (2007), qualitative research emphasizes situated understanding, where research questions require "direct attention to the setting or phenomenon being targeted

for exploration" (p. 281). With this in mind, the following research questions directed this study:

1. At a university that recently implemented a preferred name change policy, how does the ability to formally use chosen names affect how trans students narrate and understand their experiences in both learning and social environments on campus?
2. In what ways (if any) does a formalized institutional preferred name change policy contribute to identity development and persistence within the context of engagement, sense of belonging, mattering, and validation for trans students using a chosen name on campus?

Method

The research in this study was done using a social constructivist paradigm to understand how trans students made meaning of the preferred name change policy. This approach allowed individuals to make subjective meanings from their experiences (Creswell, 2013). Based on the experiences described by the participant, knowledge was then co-constructed by the participant and the researcher (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012). This perspective is closely linked to the nature of knowledge, and how individuals make meaning based on previous knowledge of an experience (Crotty, 1988). As a social constructivist researcher, I made sense of their experiences because of my own historical and social experiences, and together we constructed knowledge surrounding their reality of the preferred name change policy.

Methodologically, narrative inquiry was used as my qualitative approach to this research. This approach works well with social constructivism because the ability to

make meaning specifically comes out of this type of inquiry. Ben-Ari (1998) writes, "Thinking, perception, imagination, and moral decision making are based on narrative structure" (p. 155). The narrative structure in this approach focused on the personal and social; the past, present, and future; and the place or situation within which the narratives occur (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). My participants were purposefully sampled to bring forth rich narratives about their experiences with the preferred name change policy.

Narratives from the students were collected through semi-structured interviews, which narrative researchers believe are useful in meaning making and identity (Riessman, 1993). My analysis used Saldaña's (2016) codes to theory method, and I did this using a supportive voice to foreground the students' experiences as defined by Chase (2005). Using Saldaña's approach, I analyzed my data into codes using first and second cycle coding. This coding led me to categories and themes which led me to my findings (Table 5.1), and to my overarching findings (Figure 6.1)

Significance of the Study

The rationale for studying a preferred name change policy experience was to better understand how it affected the trans students it was supposed to be helping. This research filled a gap in the current literature as an initial inquiry into how trans college students react to a preferred name change policy at an urban public university, and it offered a perspective of trans college students in regard to their own identity development. This study was done using a qualitative narrative approach in order to: create a complex, detailed understanding of how students narrate their experience with the policy; empower trans students to share their stories; and understand the academic setting these students navigate (Creswell, 2013). By empowering trans students to tell

their stories, we can preserve, and build on them for important future research on this population of college students (Ashton, 2019). This study is also significant because these findings will be handed over to administrators at GLSU for policy reassessment.

Organization of Dissertation

Chapter 1 presented an introduction to the problems postsecondary institutions present for trans college students. The chapter also elaborated upon the significance of the study, which is highlighted by the lack of research on policy implementation and assessment. The research questions and overview of the theoretical models used to guide this study conclude this first chapter. Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive literature review supporting and guiding the study. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology being used in this research. Chapter 4 presents the narrative stories of the students. Chapter 5 presents the findings from this research. Finally, Chapter 6 connects the findings to my theoretical framework and literature, discusses policy recommendations, limitations, and implications for future research and practice.

Glossary

Blackboard – the university software system used for online learning. Faculty who teach in person also use this system for students to access syllabi and turn in assignments.

CampusConnect – the university software system that is used by students, staff, and faculty. Students use this software to register for courses, view activity to their schedules and accounts, sign off on financial aid documents, and view grades. Staff use this software to help students with the above activities, and faculty use this software to enter grades and pull class rosters.

Cisgender – the term *cisgender* or *cis* has replaced the term *nontransgender* in much of the literature (Nicolazzo, 2017).

Dead Name – a legal name that a trans person no longer uses and does not want other people to use in reference to them

Engagement – time and effort that students place on educational activities, and the effort and resources institutions place on these activities (Kuh et al., 2007).

Gender Dysphoria – a conflict between a person's physical or assigned gender and the gender with which he/she/they identify

Gender Expression – the way we express our gender to the outside world, and it is often presented through performative cues that may include clothing, body language, and mannerisms (Jourian, 2015a; Stryker, 2017).

Gender Identity – refers to a person's psychological and emotional self-conception of their own gender (Jourian, 2015a).

Identity – how college students make sense of who they are while they are in college

LGBTQ+ – the acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and any other identity that people use to identify their sexual or gender identity.

Mattering – the need to be appreciated, noticed, and acknowledged at both the interpersonal and societal level (Goodman et al., 2006)

Nontraditional Student – a college student who did not enter college after the completion of high school. These students have gained different experiences during the time between the completion of high school and entering the system of higher education. These students may include, but are not limited to veterans, second

career students, young parents, AmeriCorps or Peace Corps volunteers, and others who pursued work before attending college.

Passing – the ability to be socially (mis)read as having a particular gender identity (Nicolazzo, 2017)

Persistence – a student-centered measure that tracks a student's ability to move forward toward graduation (Hagerdon, 2012)

Sense of Belonging – a person's belief that they are indispensable, recognized, and accepted as a member of a community (Strayhorn, 2019).

Ticked Box Approach – practice in higher education to do the bare minimum to meet compliance with policies and practices (Ahmed, 2012)

Traditional Student – a college student who entered higher education immediately following the completion of their high school education

Urban Public University – in contrast to rural, land grant universities, this university has a substantial amount of commuter students, a broad range of educational opportunities, more accessible education to those living in urban areas, and a deep sense of commitment to the urban community surrounding the university.

Validation – implies students should be recognized and supported for who they are, and the diversity they bring to the campus (Rendón, 1994)

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature impacting this study on trans student persistence and policy implementation includes several key areas of consideration, which inform the theoretical models used in this research. In order to pull together a framework for understanding trans students, trans student persistence, and policy implications, the literature in this review focuses primarily on: (1) research on trans students; (2) traditional retention and persistence models; (3) contemporary social and psychological concepts connected to marginalized college student populations; (4) campus climate and microaggressions; (5) Schlossberg's transition theory; (6) variables connected to college transition in this particular study; and (7) policy development and resources for trans students.

This literature review established the knowledge base framing my narrative inquiry. This base created the informative road map to this research that both built the study and guided analysis of the data. In addition, this section reviews a number of studies that explore historical and contemporary empirical research providing structure to this research, and it highlights the gaps that still exist in this field. Up until the last

decade, the research on trans students has primarily been viewed within LGBTQ+ conceptual frameworks. Because of this, some of the research discussed here encompasses studies on the overall LGBTQ+ community that has previously provided some insight into trans college student experiences.

Research on Trans Students

Trans students have always existed on college campuses, but without inclusive policies, they have not always been recognized. While it is hard to quantify the number of trans students on college campuses, Nicolazzo and Marine (2015) suggest an approximate number could be based on the data that 2% of the adult US population identifies as transgender (Conron et al., 2012). When the 2% number is applied to the total number of college students, there could be up to 360,000 college students who identify as trans (Nicolazzo & Marine, 2015). Even with that estimate, it is still difficult to capture this student population in data because many surveys do not list transgender as a response option (Dugan et al., 2012).

Empirical research on trans college students began only 15 years ago (Beemyn, 2019). Before 2005, articles published on this population focused on personal experiences (Rabideau, 2000) and recommendations regarding how college campuses should become more trans inclusive (Beemyn, 2003; Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005; Lees, 1998). Initially much of the research on trans students fell under the LGBTQ+ umbrella, but the experiences of trans students have been found to be different than students who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) (Bilodeau, 2005; Catalano, 2017; Dugan et al., 2012). Garvey et al. (2019) contend that scholars who examine campus climate for trans students through the lens of LGBTQ+ experiences are failing to

recognize the unique experiences of trans college students. Because of this, studies focusing solely on trans college experiences have been able to illuminate the unique persistence needs of this population of students (Goldberg, 2019; Nicolazzo, 2017; Pryor, 2015).

The first qualitative research studies on trans college students published in 2005 described reactions from friends and family when they disclosed their gender identity (Pusch, 2005); examined barriers trans undergraduate and graduate students had to navigate with almost no support from campuses (McKinney, 2005); and provided insight into the identity development of two trans students at a Midwestern research university (Bilodeau, 2005). All three studies described how college campuses can be hostile environments for trans students and made recommendations based on these findings. The predominant themes in the literature on trans college students over the past 15 years revolved around colleges and universities as environments hostile to trans students, their engagement and involvement patterns on college campuses, and their strategies to persist (Lange et al., 2019).

In 2009, Bilodeau's *Genderism* became the first published book on trans college students and has been a foundational piece of work for the scholarship that has followed because it specifically defines the barriers these students face on campuses (Jourian, 2017; Marine, 2017; Nicolazzo, 2017; Pryor, 2018; Wentling, 2015; Woodford et al., 2017). According to Bilodeau (2009), genderism on college campuses features four main characteristics: forced social labeling processes; social accountability for conforming to gender binary roles; marginalization occurring by privileging binary systems; and binary systems promoting the invisibility of gender nonconforming identities and the isolation of

trans persons. Students who conform to the gender binary systems that Bilodeau discussed are privileged on college campuses (Jourian, 2015b). One way to begin breaking down genderism and cisnormativity on college campuses is the enactment of university policies that validate identity and provide a level of personal safety for trans students (Bilodeau, 2009; Goldberg, 2018).

Up until the last decade, few LGBTQ+ studies solely explored the experiences of trans college students (Renn, 2010). In the past ten years, however, empirical studies on trans students have focused on single campus experiences (Pryor, 2015; Nicolazzo, 2017), experiences on multiple campuses (Bilodeau, 2009; Catalano, 2017; Jourian, 2017; Seelman, 2014), co-curricular experiences (Bazarsky et al., 2015), trans alumnx experiences (Garvey et al., 2018), the different roles of faculty (BrckaLorenz et al., 2018; Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017; Linley & Nguyen, 2016), trans student strategies for navigating college campuses (Bilodeau, 2009; Goldberg, 2019; Nicolazzo, 2017; Pryor, 2015; Seelman, 2014), trans student resilience on campus (Nicolazzo, 2017; Singh et al., 2012), and campus climate (Garvey & Rankin, 2015). Research with this population has gone from deficit-based to empowering as qualitative studies have shown that trans students are resilient social agents on college campuses (Nicolazzo, 2017; Singh et al., 2012). These empowering studies have also become more collaborative, and they have moved the lens from looking at trans students to looking with trans students when exploring college campus experiences (Jourian & Nicolazzo, 2016). Not all trans college students have the resources to be resilient social agents; therefore persistence can be particularly challenging for this population of students (Marine, 2017; Seelman, 2014).

To address this issue, a review of college student retention and persistence concepts were connected to the limited literature on trans student experiences.

Retention and Persistence

In order to examine the literature on overall college student persistence, it is imperative to differentiate between retention and persistence. Though these two terms are often used interchangeably, there are differences. Hagerdon (2012) points out that the National Center for Education Statistics defines retention as a measure used by institutions, while persistence is a student-centered measure. Hagerdon (2012) argues that one way to think of these terms is to understand that "institutions retain and students persist" (p. 85). In other words, institutions create a learning environment through retention efforts (i.e. policies and programming) that are designed to help students persist on college campuses.

Traditional Models of Student Persistence

My research involved college students that are both traditional and nontraditional; therefore it is important to understand both of these student populations. Tinto (1975, 1993) and Bean and Metzner (1985) have produced two of the retention and persistence models that are most often discussed in the literature regarding traditional and nontraditional students respectively (Tovar, 2013). According to Aljohani (2016), before 1970 most attempts to study college student retention and persistence were based on analyzing the characteristics of students, rather than the interaction between student and the institution. The issue of persistence was explained by discussing personal attributes and shortcomings of students; therefore the studies were more psychological in nature than sociological (Aljohani, 2016). Kuh (2015) described research on persistence up to

the middle of the 20th century as "Darwinist" (p. ix), celebrating the abilities of students who already had the tools to succeed based on class and race while positing that students who did not have such tools were doomed to withdraw because they could not navigate the college process successfully. In the 1970's, research shifted to assert that educational experiences were not monolithic for students, and that colleges had an obligation to modify policies and procedures to be more inclusive of diverse populations (Kuh, 2015). Carter et al. (2013) referred to the research models used in this shift as age and stage models. These age models looked at persistence through external factors, such as age and student type, while stage models are linear illustrating how students potentially move through stages to degree completion.

Tinto's Model of Individual Student Departure. Tinto's theory of student departure (1975, 1993) has been the most cited model in the vast amount of literature on student retention and persistence over the past 45 years (Carter et al., 2013; Metz, 2004). The student departure theory "highlights the varying difficulties individuals face over time in attempting to persist in college" (Tinto, 1988, p. 439). The theory was adapted from the work of social anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep, who studied the rites of passage and membership in tribal societies (Tinto, 1988). Van Gennep (1960) referred to the rites of passage as transmission stages. He categorized the three stages as: separation, transition, and incorporation, and asserted that individuals moved through them sequentially until they were fully incorporated as participating members of adult society. Tinto took these three stages and applied them to college student persistence in his student departure model.

Tinto incorporated Durkheim's (1951) research on suicide to explain how the analogy of suicide helps to reveal the ways social interactions encourage students to withdraw or persist (Tinto, 1993). Tinto felt Durkheim's work on suicide translated well to student persistence because it discussed withdrawal from a community based on forms of rejection within that community. Tinto (1993) believed that "Durkheim's work, like that of Van Gennep, provides us a way of understanding how colleges, comprised as they are of differing social and intellectual communities, come to influence the leaving of their students" (p. 104).

Tinto also built on the work of Spady who was the first to use Durkheim's research in sociological student retention theory. Spady's (1970, 1971) undergraduate dropout process model asserted that if a student aligned with the normative values of the college environment, the student would be able to adapt both socially and academically (Berger et al., 2012). In this case, the more the student assimilated to the college and not the other way around, the more engaged the student would be in academic and social activities (Tovar, 2013). Spady thought his longitudinal interdisciplinary approach would provide a more thorough explanation of attrition than previous models, but Morrison and Silverman (2012) found the model to be flawed because it only studied a single institution; therefore it was hard to generalize results from school to school. Several studies have used Spady's theory to examine student and faculty interactions (Endo & Harpel, 1982; Pascarella & Terezini, 1979), and have experienced similar limitations based on single institution studies. However, Tinto took this model and made integration more generalizable by looking at the characteristics of different types of institutions (Aljohani, 2016).

Tinto's (1975, 1993) theory on student departure applies the three stages created by Van Gennep to highlight the difficulties students face over time while trying to persist in college. In this model the separation stage requires students to disassociate themselves from previous communities, such as residences or high school culture. According to Tinto (1988), "For virtually all students, the process of separation from the past is at least somewhat stressful, and the pains of parting at least temporarily disorienting" (p. 443). The second stage represents the transition to college stage, the passage between old and new. Here, Tinto describes the students who are experiencing a sense of loss; they are no longer strongly bonded to the past, but not yet tied to the future. In the first and second stages, the student's response to the separation and transition determines if they will persist in college.

The third stage in Tinto's model is incorporation wherein students adopt norms that help them establish strong bonds in social and intellectual communities of college life. This stage is built on the successful passage of the separation stage and the transition stage. If students are unable to incorporate themselves into communities on college campuses, there is a strong chance they will not be successful and will eventually withdraw from college (Tinto, 1975, 1993). The incorporation stage requires that students feel a sense of belonging, not only in the classroom, but in co-curricular activities as well. Tinto (1988) found that "Persistence in college may arise either in the academic and/or in the social system of the institution and reflect both the personal and intellectual integration of incorporation of the individual into the communities of the college" (p. 448). While Tinto's theory suggests students persist based on how well they integrate into

academic and social spheres on campus, Carter et al. (2013) found that this is not the case for marginalized students encountering hostile campus climates.

Tinto's policy has taken harsh criticism from scholars who do not believe it does enough to cover the experiences of marginalized students (Carter et al., 2013; Goldberg et al., 2019; Guiffrida, 2006; Johnson et al., 2007; Rendon et al., 2000; Tierney, 1992). Guiffrida (2006) wrote, "One significant cultural limitation of the theory that is well established in higher education literature relates to Tinto's (1993) assertion that students need to 'break away' from past association and traditions to become integrated into the college's social and academic realms" (p. 451). Guiffrida (2006) believes Tinto's theory can be culturally relevant if significant changes are made to it, such as removing exclusionary terminology, understanding that separation from previous culture is unnecessary for student success, and challenging the idea that students must assimilate into the majority culture of an institution.

According to Metz (2004), Tinto's model and other college student persistence models have ignored certain groups of students, "minority groups are missing from extensive inclusion in the literature, including physically challenged, gay, and lesbian students, and sub groups of nontraditional students" (p. 202). Even though scholars believe Tinto's model is flawed for marginalized students, it is still consistently used to discuss persistence and retention for this category of students. In a recent study, Goldberg et al. (2019) discussed the limitations of Tinto's theory, but still used it to analyze persistence issues for trans college students. Goldberg et al. (2019) found the reasons trans students left college aligned with the reasons Tinto established for leaving college based on lack of institutional fit. However, when it comes to trans student persistence,

Tinto's theory is nuanced by the conditions trans students list for leaving that are much different from cisgender students.

Bean and Metzner's Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Undergraduate Student Attrition. Bean and Metzner (1985) argue that Tinto's theory does not allow for measurement of nontraditional students in retention models (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Morrison & Silverman, 2012). Bean and Metzner wrote (1985), "One defining characteristic of the nontraditional student was the lack of social integration into the institution; therefore, a different theory must be used to link the variables in this model" (p. 489). Understanding nontraditional student persistence models is critical because almost 40% of all college students are now considered nontraditional students (Hussar & Bailey, 2014).

As part of their theoretical development, Bean and Metzner (1985) found that defining nontraditional students can be difficult, but they normally meet at least one of these characteristics: part-time student, commuting student, and are older than 24. Nontraditional students are also distinguishable "by the lessened intensity and duration of their interaction with the primary agents of socialization (faculty, peers) at the institutions they attend" (Bean & Metzner, 1985, p. 488). Because of these differences, Bean and Metzner created a model of retention that no longer focused on integration, but rather on background variables (age, enrollment status, residence, educational goals, high school performance, ethnicity, and gender); psychological variables (utility of educational experience, satisfaction, goal commitment, and stress); and environmental factors (finances, hours of employment, outside encouragement, family responsibilities, and opportunity to transfer).

In this model, environmental factors had the highest negative impact on persistence compared to the other two factors in the theory (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Morrison & Silverman, 2012). Overall, the model includes more interaction with external environmental factors and less interaction with the academic environment. Other studies have aligned with Bean and Metzner's original findings of Bean & Metzner especially studies of community college students who tend to be nontraditional (Crawford-Sorey & Harris-Dugan, 2008; Stahl & Pavel, 1992; Yu, 2015). Nontraditional students are explored in this study because there are larger numbers of these students at urban universities due to the commuter appeal of the schools.

The models developed by Tinto (1975, 1993) and Bean and Metzner (1985) have been successful in the past for understanding the needs of traditional and nontraditional college students. However, it is important to build on these models using more contemporary concepts that directly address the needs of marginalized college students, such as sense of belonging, engagement, mattering, and validation. All four of these concepts shed more light on student populations—including trans students—who are rarely mentioned in traditional retention and persistence models. In more recent literature, Tinto (2012) discussed the need for engagement as a variable for student success. When this social concept is explored in connection with the psychological constructs of sense of belonging, mattering and validation, the institution's responsibility in regard to retention and persistence for marginalized students becomes more apparent (Schlossberg et al., 1989; Tillapaugh, 2019).

Sense of Belonging

According to Maslow (1962), all individuals share a strong need to belong. Sense of belonging characterizes a person's belief that they are indispensable, recognized, and accepted as a member of a community (Anant, 1966; Strayhorn, 2019; Tovar, 2013). Baumeister and Leary (1995) argued that a lack of sense of belonging can lead to negative emotional and cognitive repercussions, and that the need to belong plays a large role in increasing motivation for individuals. Surprisingly, it was not until the past 25 years that it has been studied in the literature on college-aged populations.

Hurtado and Carter (1997) were the first to connect sense of belonging to higher education literature in their research (Tovar, 2013). Hurtado and Carter (1997) measured the degree to which the perceived sense of belonging Latino college students formed in their first two years contribute to sense of belonging in their third years. (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Tovar, 2013). The study found that first year experiences that engage the learner lead to positive effects, while the perception of a hostile racial campus climate had negative effects on students' sense of belonging in the third year. Strayhorn (2019) connected sense of belonging to college students by writing, "In terms of college, sense of belonging refers to students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus such as faculty, staff, and peers" (p. 4). Strayhorn (2019) argues that a focus on campus climate that includes increased sense of belonging for students should be emphasized as much as institutional predictive analytics that focus on retention and persistence.

Studies on college students and sense of belonging have grown since Hurtado and Carter's empirical research on this topic. Hoffman et al. (2003) examined how sense of belonging helps to explain retention efforts, and what campus policy planners need to do to increase sense of belonging for students at risk for departure from schools. The two strongest variables in the Hoffman et al. (2003) study were supportive peer relationships and compassionate faculty who helped students feel valued on campus. Johnson et al. (2007) took issue with the way persistence was explored using Tinto's theory of student departure because it places too much emphasis on the student finding ways to succeed, and not enough responsibility on the institution to change and adapt to support marginalized students. They believe one of the ways this can be remedied is by looking at sense of belonging measures for different ethnic and racial groups of students. Like Hurtado and Carter (1997), Johnson et al. (2007) found perceptions of the campus racial climate had strong significant relationships to students' sense of belonging on campus and persistence.

Overall sense of belonging has been found to play a key role in college student persistence (Johnson et al., 2007; Morrow & Salomone, 2003; Strayhorn, 2019). When students feel valued on a college campus through positive peer and faculty relationships and policies that help create a positive campus climate, they are more likely to persist. Sense of belonging also provides a lens to explore marginalized populations of students who often get overlooked in the research. Strayhorn (2019) suggests that sense of belonging is more important for certain student populations that may be less likely to engage, and until those students feel like they can engage, they will have trouble completing academic tasks.

Engagement

According to Kuh et al. (2007), college student engagement is characterized by two critical features: time and effort that students place on educational activities, and the effort and resources institutions place on those activities. While the terms *engagement* and *involvement* are often thought of as synonymous in higher education literature, engagement places more responsibility on the institution than on the student for student success (Kuh, 2001; Tovar, 2013; Wolf-Wendel, et al., 2009). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) believe "it is important to focus on the ways in which an institution can shape its academic, interpersonal, and extracurricular offerings to encourage student engagement" (p. 602). If an institution successfully creates engagement opportunities, this is a good indication of positive institutional quality (Kuh et al., 2007). On the other hand, students are at risk for attrition when schools do not customize engagement efforts to connect students to campus (Quaye & Harper, 2015).

The concept of engagement adds to the understanding of how to promote student development and success (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). Empirical evidence on college student engagement has consistently shown that when students are actively engaged on a college campus, they are more likely to persist through graduation, but "when campus climates are hostile and antagonistic toward certain students, disengagement, dropping out, and maladjustment are likely unintended outcomes" (Quaye & Harper, 2015, p. 7). Tinto (1993) found that engagement is the most important predictor of persistence for college students (Tinto, 1993; Quaye & Harper, 2015).

The National Survey of Student Engagement was created to study engagement on college campuses nationally because this concept has become such an imperative tool for

studying college student success and retention (Tovar, 2013). This survey examines level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student faculty interaction, supportive campus environment, and enriching educational experiences (Tovar, 2013). These variables are the most prominent in the college student engagement literature (Tillapaugh, 2019; Tovar, 2013). Studies have been done on many different student groups revealing how engagement is especially important for marginalized student populations, and, in particular the trans college student population (Bilodeau, 2009; Nicolazzo, 2017; Marine & Catalano, 2015). According to Tillapaugh (2019), engagement studies often center students who fit the dominant culture, and rarely explore the reasons marginalized students are less likely to get involved and assimilate to that culture. Reframing student involvement and engagement by examining why students do not become engaged--especially for trans students who may feel ostracized on a college campus--is critical to the understanding of engagement for these students (Tillapaugh, 2019).

Mattering

Mattering is the need to be appreciated, noticed, and acknowledged at both the interpersonal and societal level (Goodman et al., 2006, Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981; Tovar, 2013). Compared to sense of belonging and engagement, mattering has not been studied extensively in higher education literature even though it influences both sense of belonging and levels of engagement for college students (France & Finney, 2010; Tovar et al., 2009). Just as sense of belonging motivates individuals so too does the social construct of mattering (Goodman et al., 2006; Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). It is subjective and perception depends on the individual (Marshall, & Lambert, 2006).

Rosenberg and McCullough introduced the concept of mattering in 1981 as a form of social validation featuring three distinct elements: attention or the feeling that one garners the interest of others; importance, or the belief that others care about us; and dependence, or the realization that others depend on us. Schlossberg (1989), who was the first to connect mattering to college students, believes there is a fourth element to mattering, appreciation, which is the feeling that we are appreciated by people we care about.

Schlossberg (1989) determined whether college students felt marginal or if they felt like they mattered based on their level of engagement with the campus community arguing that marginality and mattering are polar themes that influence one another. When people feel marginalized they are much more likely to feel like they do not matter to those around them. Marginality can be both a permanent condition based on how society views individuals, and a temporary condition that often occurs during transitional life changes, such as a new job or starting school (Schlossberg, 1989).

With regard to college students, Schlossberg et al. (1989) found that focusing on student mattering created campuses where students were more motivated to learn, be engaged, and persist. The work of Schlossberg (1989) and Schlossberg et al. (1989) has influenced several studies on college students that examined mattering, such as studies on first-year students (Dixon-Rayle & Chung, 2007), diverse urban college students (Tovar et al., 2009), variables that impact mattering on residential campuses (France & Finney, 2010), and family and peer support for college students (Marshall et al., 2010). Overall, mattering has been an understudied variable in student persistence literature, which is

strange because Schlossberg et al. (1989) believe institutions that prioritize mattering also improve student motivation and engagement.

Validation

One way to make students feel like they matter is to validate them both academically and interpersonally (Rendón, 1994). Rendón-Linares and Munoz (2011) believe Schlossberg's (1989) theory of mattering and marginality is reflective of interpersonal validation for students in which they feel needed and appreciated to the campus community. Rendón-Linares and Munoz (2011) discussed this when revisiting Rendón's theory of validation. Rendón's (1994) theory of validation reveals there are two different types of validation for students: academic and interpersonal. Academic validation occurs within the classroom from faculty, and interpersonal validation occurs when the campus and external support help students with personal development and social adjustment outside of the classroom. Rendón (1994) found what happens in the classroom is just as important as what happens outside of the classroom, and when students are more likely to feel they could be successful when they feel validated.

The concept of validation implies students should be recognized and supported for who they are, and the diversity they bring to the campus (Rendón, 1994). Rendón found that student diversity is a strength, and the challenge is up to the institution not the student to "harness that strength, and how to unleash the creativity and exuberance for learning that is present in all students who feel free to learn, free to be who they are, and validated for what they know and believe" (p. 51). This lines up with the previous research on mattering as well. According to Tovar (2013), when students perceive they matter or feel validated, they are more likely to engage in curricular and co-curricular

activities. Rendón's (1994) theory of validation was created to study nontraditional and/or underrepresented college students. This is apparent in studies that have used validation theory to examine LGBTQ+ community college students (Garvey et al., 2015) and in research that looks at minority community college transfer students (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014).

Engagement, sense of belonging, mattering, and validation are critical to student persistence. These are the factors dictated by campus climate, which often predicts persistence (Carter et al., 2013; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2003; Strayhorn, 2019). This is especially true for trans college students who not only have to get past the same barriers cisgender college students face, but who also have to deal with harassment issues, and often enter college with more financial and mental health issues than cisgender students (Goldberg et al., 2019; Stolzenberg and Hughes, 2017).

Trans College Students and Persistence

Trans student face psychological, financial, and physical barriers that cisgender students do not often face (Dugan et al., 2012). The 2015 US Transgender Survey found that 24% of respondents who reported being publicly out as trans in college also reported being verbally, physically, or sexually harassed while in school, and of the 24% who reported being harassed, 16% dropped out of school because of the harassment (James et al., 2016). Even with the barriers trans students face, there are still more out trans students on college campuses than ever before (Bilodeau, 2009; Wentling, 2019).

Many studies regarding trans students focus on persistence issues for these students because the barriers they continuously face on college campuses makes withdrawal from college feel like the easy way out of these circumstances. The trans

students who remain on campus are resilient, and often have to navigate the college campus without assistance from faculty, administrators or inclusive practices. (Nicolazzo, 2017; Singh et al., 2012). This is why a majority of studies on trans students focus on campus climate. Campus climate describes practices that discriminate against students, including microaggressions that affect trans student persistence. These issues are predictive factors that Mancini (2011) believes should be addressed by all campuses. An unsafe campus climate affects sense of belonging, engagement, mattering, and validation, which in turn, affects a trans student's ability to persist.

Campus Climate and Microaggressions

Garvey et al. (2017) defined campus climate as "the attitudes, behaviors, standards, and practices of employees and students of an institution, particularly those that relate to access, inclusion, and respect for individual group needs, abilities, and potential" (p. 61). A negative campus climate is more likely for trans students than LGB students (Garvey & Rankin, 2015a). For example, Dugan et al. (2012) compared 91 trans students with matched samples of cisgender LGB and heterosexual students, and found trans students encountered harassment on college campuses more frequently while experiencing a lower sense of belonging than cisgender students. Educational gains for trans students were also found to be lower than their peers. Overall, there are significant differences between campus climate experiences for trans students compared to their cisgender peers--even those that identity as LGB.

Microaggressions are both intentional and unintentional exchanges that send a negative message to people of marginalized identities (Marine & Catalano, 2015). Woodford et al. (2017) considered some examples of microaggressions for trans college

students to be schools not allowing a student to use a chosen name or the inability of a school to provide safe bathroom facilities. Campus microaggressions can cause trans students to be less engaged on campus, which can increase the possibility of withdrawing from school (Woodford et al., 2017). Minority stressors that could be categorized as campus microaggressions were found to be positively correlated with psychological distress in trans students (Breslow et al., 2015). These stressors made trans students feel like they did not belong or matter on campus.

Goldberg (2019) assessed campus climate and microaggressions for trans students, and found these students were disheartened when faculty asked for chosen names and pronouns, but do not use the chosen names and pronouns of the students. These instances were magnified for trans students who used pronouns other than *he* or *she*, i.e. *singular they*. According to Bazarsky et al. (2015), "A microinvalidation can occur if an advisor asks for a chosen name but then doesn't use that name in correspondence or communication" (p. 64). Even when faculty have positive intentions, students can still feel dismissed in the classroom when microaggressions occur.

Overt discrimination on college campuses towards queer-spectrum (LGBTQ+) individuals has been replaced with microaggressions that create a negative campus climate leading to withdrawal from school. Garvey et al. (2018) found that LGBTQ+ students had greater academic success when they perceived campus administration was taking steps to improve campus climate and remove microaggressions. Garvey et al. (2018) wrote, "The findings from this study support the premise that positive perceptions and institutional response perceptions significantly influence queer-spectrum student's persistence" (p. 12). For example, Garvey et al. (2019) found that a favorable response to

a trans student disclosing their gender identity to staff, faculty, and peers provided a strong signal to trans students that the environment on college campuses is beginning to change for the better.

In their 2019 study, Goldberg et al. explored the institutional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal reasons trans students left college. These reasons include lack of gender inclusive bathrooms, hostility from students and faculty, anticipatory anxiety, feelings of isolation on campus, unsupportive family members, and financial concerns that came from a lack of resources to cover medical needs. Trans students have found that navigating a harsh campus climate made persistence hard and leaving school easier—especially the first time they entered college. These students found going back to college after dropping out was easier because they had a better sense of how to navigate the campus climate issues after dealing with those issues previously (Goldberg et al., 2019).

Trans students feel anxious about being misgendered or having their legal name used instead of their chosen name in front of their peers (Pryor, 2015). Pryor (2015) argues the need for "instructors and practitioners to continually reflect on the potential consequences classroom experiences have on students' academic and overall college experience. The participants lived these consequences when they felt forced to drop courses, mask their identities, or withdraw from classroom participation" (p. 453). Discrimination against trans students is continually reified in college classrooms when the trans identity of students is not accepted (Newhouse, 2013). When students--especially marginalized students—do not feel accepted or validated on a college campus, it is harder for them to persist (Quaye & Harper, 2015; Rendón, 1994; Strayhorn, 2019; Tillapaugh, 2019; Tinto, 1993).

A Psychosocial Model of Transition

While studying persistence through campus climate and traditional retention and persistence models has been done in a majority of college persistence scholarship, psychosocial models can also establish a framework for persistence because they lend insight into coping methods for students (Carter et al., 2013). Previous studies that relied solely on traditional models of integration to examine college student persistence were unable to account for the ways marginalized students find it difficult to integrate on college campuses (Carter et al., 2013). One example of a psychosocial model is Schlossberg's transition theory. The usage of this theory in retention and persistence literature represents a shift from the age and stage models primarily used to study the concepts of retention and persistence (Carter et al., 2013; Evans et al., 2010; Metz, 2004; Tovar, 2013). Schlossberg's model works well with trans college students because research shows they have difficulty integrating on college campuses (Bilodeau, 2009; Goldberg et al., 2019; Nicolazzo, 2017).

A major part of transition theory are the The Four S's—situation, self, strategies, and support—which are an inventory of the resources and deficits that can affect persistence for trans students. Looking at these four factors provides a new lens to study trans traditional and nontraditional students and persistence issues at urban public universities. Schlossberg's transition theory will be used to understand if or how students can move from the transition stage to the incorporation stage in Tinto's model. This movement indicates a better chance of persistence for the trans students in this study.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Schlossberg's transition theory has undergone an evolution since it first appeared in *The Counseling Psychologist* in 1981 (Evans et al, 2010). Initially the transition model was a vehicle for "analyzing human adaptation to transition" (Schlossberg, 1981, p. 2). At that time, the model was defined by the characteristics of both the individual and the transition. Transition theory was developed to help mental health counselors working with adults going through transitions. Schlossberg updated it in 1984 to link it to helping models to exemplify how counselors could help those individuals moving through transitions (Evans et al., 2010). In 1989 Schlossberg added significant changes to the model that were more representative of the current model. The big change was the addition of the Four S's: situation, self, support, and strategies. The Four S's represented coping resources or deficits for those going through a transition (Evans, et al., 2010).

Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) wrote *Counseling Adults in Transition* to illustrate the ways the model can be used by counselors helping adults in transition. A transition is defined as, "Any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 33). These transitions often require new patterns of behavior, but a transition is only defined as a transition in this model if the person experiencing it believes it has an impact on their life (Goodman et al., 2006). The primary argument of this model is that different individuals may react differently to change (Carter et al., 2013).

Schlossberg's transition model has three parts to it: approaching transitions (type, context, and impact), taking stock of coping resources (the 4 S System), and strengthening resources (strengthening the 4 S's) (Goodman, et al., 2006). The type,

context, and impact of the transition must be considered to understand the meaning a transition has for a particular individual. The first step in approaching transitions is to identity the type of transition. There are three different types of transitions as outlined by Goodman et al. (2006): anticipated, unanticipated, and non-event (was anticipated, but did not happen). The individual's appraisal of the event is then key to moving forward through the model when assessing the 4 S's and context of the transition. The impact is then understood from the context, "For an individual undergoing a transition, it is not the event or non-event that is most important but its impact, that is, the degree to which the transition alters one's daily life" (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 37).

The second part of the model is the 4 S System—situation, self, support, and strategies—which describes the variables used to help individuals cope with a transition. Goodman et al. (2006), found that these concepts can be both assets and liabilities. The Four S's change for individuals contingent on cultural values and resources available to them (Carter et al., 2013). *Situation* describes the context of the event and the individual's reaction to the event. *Self* is what the individual brings to the transition, such as demographics and identity. *Support* is broken down into intimate relationships, family units, networks of friends, and the institutions and/or communities of which the people belong (Goodman et al., 2006). Finally, *strategies* are the coping techniques people use to deal with transition (Schlossberg, 2011). The third major part of the model is the ability to assess and utilize the Four S's, so they can be resources and not barriers to transition (Goodman et al., 2006).

What started out as a counseling approach for adults going through individual, relationship, and work transitions has been applied to many different groups, including

those going through educational transitions (Carter et al., 2013). Evans et al. (2010) believe the framework of the theory helps students—both adult learners and traditional undergraduates—take inventory of assets and liabilities as they move through educational transitions. The theory has been used with a number of student populations, who have gone through personal and academic transitions in their lives, such as nontraditional commuter students (Jacoby & Garland, 2004), students of color attending predominantly white institutions (Carter et al., 2013; McCoy 2014), and veteran students returning to college (Griffin and Gilbert, 2015; Livingston et al., 2011).

Transition Theory and LGBTQ+ Students. There has been limited research connecting Schlossberg's transition theory to LGBTQ+ students. Ford et al. (2015) discussed the different ways these students can face barriers on campus while not knowing where to turn for support—especially if the students had additional issues, such as being transfer students or nontraditional students. Ford et al. (2015) recommended using transition theory for LGBTQ+ students navigating these barriers. Heaton (2017) used Schlossberg's work to explore the lived experiences of undergraduate trans students at four year schools in the southern part of the United States. Heaton combined transition theory, minority stress theory, and academic and social integration theories to examine how trans students navigated college campuses that historically have not been inclusive to them. The emphasis on transition theory in this study was on the Four S's in the students' lives as coping mechanisms (Heaton, 2017).

The Four S's of Transition Theory

This section defines the Four S's in regard to studies looking at identity development for trans students on urban campuses in regard to policy and programming.

Situation describes campus and student type, and it lends understanding as to why and how students react to campus policies the way they do. *Self* looks at overall college student development models and social identity theories and connects that literature to identity development for students with minoritized identities of sexuality and gender (MIoSG). *Support* examines the literature regarding peer and faculty support for trans college students. Finally, *strategies* explores the coping mechanisms trans students use on college campuses to protect themselves in curricular and co-curricular situations.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory: Focus on *Situation*

In regard to college students, the study of the situation in transition theory is an exploration of the student's perception of the transition. In higher education research, the perception and context can be influenced by the type of institution and type of student (Carter et al., 2013). These variables explain how and why traditional and nontraditional trans students may or may not persist on urban campuses. In this section, two particular "types" that texture the concept of *situation* are addressed due to their relevance to this study: urban public universities and nontraditional students

Urban Public Universities. A large amount of urban public universities began to spring up after World War II (Severino. 1996) in response to urbanization, mass migration, and an increased student population of baby boomers. According to Riposa (2003), societal and technological forces converged to produce a need for urban public universities during this time period. These universities were in contrast to the rural, land grant universities that were established by the 1862 Morrill Act, and they created a dramatic shift in higher education access for students. Characteristics of an urban public university include a substantial amount of commuter students, a broad range of

educational opportunities, more accessible education to those living in urban areas, and a deep sense of commitment to the community surrounding the school (Severino, 1996).

The urban public university provides access to students who may not have many other options, or who may need to stay close to home. In a 2017 study, Strayhorn found that the Black male students in his study chose an urban public university because of accessibility, but also because the university provided a connection to their home community. Jaret and Reitzes (2009) believe that studying students at urban public universities produce more generalizable and transferable results than studies that look at students who do not attend this type of university because "findings may reflect better the experiences of the large majority of students who attend less prestigious colleges" (p. 346). Overall urban public university students are more diverse due to the urban environment that produces many of the students, and because there are fewer institutional barriers to access (Rapino, 2003; Severino, 1996).

Nontraditional Students. The students who attend urban public universities are both traditional and nontraditional. Studies on traditional students describe them as coming straight from high school, under the age of 24, dependent on legal guardians, and they often do not work outside of school (Bye et al., 2007; Macari et al., 2006). In contrast, nontraditional students are commonly defined as over the age of 25 (Bye et al., 2007; Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; Goncalves & Trunk, 2014; Tilley, 2014). Nontraditional students are also defined by different risk factors than traditional students, such as delayed enrollment, attending school part-time, working at least part-time, having dependents other than a spouse, returning to school after a break, and being financially independent (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; Goncalves & Trunk, 2014; Horn, 1996;

Kasworm, 2010). Nontraditional students are also more likely than traditional students to be distance learners even when they are enrolled at an urban public university (Picciano, 2006). When urban public universities first began springing up, most of the students who attended these institutions were nontraditional (Rapino, 2003).

Nontraditional students account for 40% of the overall college student population, and while there are more traditional students attending urban public universities than before, a majority of the students who attend these institutions are still nontraditional (Hussar & Bailey, 2014; Rapino, 2003; Tilley, 2014). With such a large number of nontraditional students attending urban public universities, there are bound to be nontraditional trans students in any study on this institution type; therefore it is important to understand the needs of nontraditional students. Ashton (2019) revealed that trans nontraditional college students feel disconnected from campus, and see commuting as a barrier to getting involved and engaged on campus. The empirical evidence on college student engagement has consistently shown that when students are actively engaged on a college campus, they are more likely to persist through graduation (Quaye & Harper, 2015). Due to the risk factors associated with nontraditional student characteristics, these students drop out of college at higher rates than traditional college students (Ashar & Skenes, 1993; Goncalves & Trunk, 2014).

Studies conducted on nontraditional students show they lead different lives outside of college that impact their academic success compared to traditional students (Bye et al., 2007; Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; Kenner & Weinerman, 2011; Tilley, 2014). The differences nontraditional students bring to a campus can present challenges to the institution, but these differences can also present opportunities based on the life

experiences of these students (Kenner & Weinerman, 2011). Kasworm (1994) found that adult learners have higher levels of satisfaction with their collegiate experience when compared to younger adult students. In a later study, Kasworm (2010) examined the ways nontraditional students make meaning of their collegiate experiences at research extensive universities, and found they typically felt supported in the classroom, but less supported by the university overall.

Nontraditional students tend to be more motivated to learn and more self-directed in the classroom than traditional students, but these factors are not always enough to keep them enrolled (Ashar & Skenes, 1993; Kenner and Weinerman, 2011). Supportive relationships on campus can also be more meaningful for nontraditional students compared to traditional students, and nontraditional students have more intrinsic motivation in the classroom. (Bye et al., 2007; Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; Kasworm, 2010). Even with these strong relationships and increased motivation, nontraditional students still do not persist at the same level as traditional students (Goncalves & Trunk, 2014). To explore additional considerations of persistence, the second dimension of Schlossberg's transition theory, *self,* is now discussed.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory: Focus on *Self*

Self in transition theory includes individual characteristics alongside psychological resources (Carter et al., 2013). This section on *self* describes the evolution of college student development. It also includes identity development models for college students based on sexuality and gender. The college student development models explain how students make sense of who they are while they are in college. Sexuality and gender identity models frame how gender identity may develop differently for trans students.

Waves of Student Identity Theory. College student development models are based on the concepts of change and sense of self. These models look at changes that happen over time to students while they are in college (Jones & Abes, 2013). Jones and Abes (2013) argue that "an understanding of identity is necessary if one is to understand college students and their experiences in higher education contexts" (p. 19). The major work on college student identity development can be viewed in three different waves (Abes et al., 2019).

The first wave of college student identity development is characterized by the idea that college students should develop as a result of their college experiences (Abes et al., 2019). Chickering's (1969) work is part of that first wave and draws largely on the psychosocial development stages as presented by Erikson (1968). Erikson recognized the role of the external social world in identity formation, and he included eight stages of linear lifespan development that helped Chickering create the original seven vectors of college student development (Jones & Abes, 2013). Chickering's (1969) original vectors were based on results from a study consisting of typical college students from the 1960s, primarily middle and upper-class white males (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Chickering and Reisser (1993) updated the work based on criticism that the vectors did not do enough to recognize diversity in age, gender, and cultural backgrounds. In order, Chickering and Riesser's (1993) seven updated vectors are: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. Each vector in this theory represents a different area of interpersonal discovery, and a better understanding of how one is unique. The vectors

also represent the connection to other individuals and the global society (Chickering & Riesser, 1993). These vectors theoretically illustrate that the development of self in college occurs through interaction with other individuals and larger groups (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

There are important social identity themes left out of Chickering and Reisser's work that affect the way college students see themselves (Jones & Abes, 2013). These themes—socially constructed identities, systems of privilege and oppression, and identity salience—are the framework of the second wave of college student development (Abes et al., 2019; Jones & Abes, 2013). They look at how identity is formed through social group membership and the value of that membership to the individual—especially in nondominant student groups left out of the first wave of student development literature (Abes et al., 2019). This is evident in studies that examine college student development with marginalized student populations (Abes et al., 2007; Jones, 1997; Vacarro et al., 2015).

In regard to identity being socially constructed, Torres et al. (2009) wrote, "One's sense of self and beliefs about one's own social group as well as others are constructed through interactions with the broader social context in which dominant values dictate norms and expectations" (p. 577). When we understand how identities are socially constructed, we then see the role of systemic privilege and oppression in meaning-making (Stewart and Brown, 2019). Privilege and oppression are mutually reinforcing and each needs the other one to exist (Jones & Abes, 2013). Privilege and oppression then influence the salience of social identities, which refers to the prominence of certain identities (Jones & Abes, 2013). These identities can become more or less salient

depending on context (Ethier and Deaux, 1994). In different contexts such as home, school, or work, identities such as race and gender may have shifting identity salience.

Like the earlier college student development work of Chickering and Reisser (1993), the themes of socially constructed identities, privilege and oppressive systems, and identity salience reflect that social identity development comes from interactions with both interpersonal groups and social systems. Identity in the second wave is characterized by the importance of group membership and a sense of belonging. Abes et al. (2019) connect this to college student development because the way these students "perceive themselves is influenced by the groups to which they belong and in which they find meaning, and also how those groups are perceived by others, thus reflecting structures of inequality" (p. 11). Second wave theories describe how these structures of inequality impact campus climate.

Second Wave Student Development Models. Building off of the college student development work done by Chickering and Riesser's (1993) vectors, and taking into consideration the major themes of social identity theory, Jones (1997) created the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI). The MMDI is a psychosocial model that produced a dynamic illustration of identity when multiple identities are being studied in college students. The MMDI allows college students to consider how salient different identities are to the core (sense of self) based on contextual influences that included sociocultural conditions, current life experiences, and family background (Jones and Abes, 2013).

In 2007 Abes, Jones, and McEwen reconceptualized the MMDI to show how cognitive and interpersonal development explain identity development in college

students. The new model was simply called the Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (RMMDI) (Jones & Abes, 2013). The RMMDI inserted a meaning making filter in between context and identity in the model. This in turn added a cognitive structural component to this model. According to Abes et al. (2007), adding meaning-making to the RMMDI provided a fuller picture of what relationships students value in regard to their own identity, and how they come to perceive these relationships the way that they do. Tinto (2012b) believes meaning making for college students happens through interactions in academic and social environments. These interactions than help students understand if they belong or if they are in a hostile climate (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Tinto, 2012b).

Abes et al. (2007) focused on the work of Kegan (1994) and Baxter Magolda (2001) when developing the meaning making filter in the RMMDI. Kegan (1994) created a theory of self-evolution that described meaning making structures. These structures led to assumptions that would determine how individuals organized their experiences. Kegan believed all experiences had to come from meaning making context. Kegan coined the term self-authorship which occurs as the individual grows and matures. Self-authorship is an internal personal identity that allows people to use their own trusted opinions to make decisions (Kegan, 1994).

Meaning Making and Self-Authorship. Baxter Magolda (2001, 2009) examined meaning making and self-authorship in her 30-year longitudinal study on college students. This study revealed how students made meaning using cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal development. Using these three stages of development, Baxter Magolda (2001) defined self-authorship as "an ability to construct knowledge in a contextual

world, an ability to construct an internal identity separate from external influences, and an ability to engage in relationships without losing one's internal identity" (p. 12). Using this meaning-making structure is how college students are able to make sense of complex situations (Jones & Abes, 2013). This path to meaning making and self-authorship is not linear for students, and different paths work better depending on challenges students face. The way students make meaning of their interactions is imperative to college student identity development. Baxter Magolda (2003) believes, "Making students' identities central to learning is crucial not only to complex meaning making but also to creating inclusive educational practices" (p. 235). When the salient identities of students are centered, policies and practices are more validating.

Ashton (2019) used Baxter Magolda's (2001, 2009) self-authorship concept with trans college students to see how they self-author their gender in the context of college. Ashton believes that gender is socially constructed, which is why it is "essential to consider how personal cognition intersects with and is influenced by an internal sense of self and by relationships with others when exploring how trans college students understand gender" (p. 92). Ashton (2019) applied Baxter Magolda's (2001, 2009) self-authorship framework to trans college students by examining the ways they construct their gender identities using external gender messages. The findings from this study exemplified the ways self-authorship is formed using cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal connections. In this study, gender was framed by self-definition, navigating gender roles, and negotiating relationships with others (Ashton, 2019).

MIoSG Development Model. The term MIoSG represents those students whose sexuality and gender identity has been socially relegated to a lower status and is reflected

by all students who identify as LGBTQ+ (Vacarro et al., 2015). By building on previous empirical studies such as the one done by Abes and Jones (2007), adding elements of Bronfenbrenner's (1993) bioecological model, and exploring models of campus climate for individuals who have MIoSG (Rankin, 2003; Rankin et al., 2010), Vacarro, et al. (2015) created the MIoSG students in context model. As opposed to the RMMDI, which named broad contextual influences, the MIoSG in context model is very specific about the different contexts influencing the meaning making of students with minoritized sexuality and gender.

The more specific contextual influences in this model are based on Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model that includes the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystems, and macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). These systems identify the way we understand how people develop through interactions with these influences (Stewart et al., 2015). The microsystem is where students have direct contact with people, the mesosystem is where there are interactions between microsystems such as peers and family, the exosystem is when the student is not present but contextual factors, such as college policies can impact a student's identity indirectly. Finally, the macrosystem holds larger sociohistorical factors, such as historical struggles and national policies.

These systems are based on Brofenbrenner's (1993) four elements: person, process, context, and time. Person represents demographics and personal experiences of the individual, process is indicative of the level of interaction individuals have, and these interactions take place within the context of the individual's life. The process of time in the Brofenbrenner model "acts in both incremental ways, and as a larger demarcation of sociocultural change" (Stewart et al., 2015, p. 3). Brofenbrenner's systems and elements

provide a foundation for the MIoSG in context model. This model exemplifies how each area of student identity theories (psychosocial, cognitive-structural, social identity, and developmental synthesis) can integrate to make a more holistic and dynamic model of college student identity through the examination of contextual factors. Goldberg and Kuvalanka (2018) found that contextual factors related to identity development, such as university policies shape opportunities for trans students.

Abes et al. (2019) describe the RMMDI and MIoSG models as second wave identity models based on the social construction of identity for marginalized student populations. They want these models to go a step further employing critical and poststructural frameworks that help college affairs administrators think and act differently. Abes et al. (2019) argue that these theoretical additions break down "the hegemonic constructions of masculinities, race, heterosexuality, and gender (and their intersections) that operate on structural, political, institutional, organizational, and individual levels" (p. xiii). By using identity models based on social construction and emancipatory theoretical models, a critical framework on student identity develops allowing practitioners to understand oppressive barriers and then remove those barriers (Abes et al., 2019).

Dynamic Gender Identity Model. Another consideration when it comes to self and identity for college students is how gender identity influences who trans students are and how they understand their own gender identity. Jourian (2015a) developed a dynamic gender model that exemplifies how gender identity and gender expression are on fluid planes. Previous models, such as the one developed by Lev (2004), showed for example that gender identity moved from masculine to feminine on a linear and binary continuum.

Jourian's (2015a) model creates a dynamic image of gender identity and expression as opposed to the model proposed by Lev (2004). Jourian (2015a) wrote, "There is a need for a more encompassing lens that forwards a dynamic perspective on sex, gender, and sexuality allowing individuals to embody any of those identities in infinite forms of expression, rather than in only one of two ways" (p. 464). Because of the genderism that exists on college campuses as discussed by Bilodeau (2009), trans college students constantly have to deal with institutional barriers to free expression of gender expression and identity; therefore it's important to understand how gender can be fluid for these students when assessing policies meant to protect these students (Jourian, 2015a).

Schlossberg's Transition Theory: Focus on *Support*

Goodman et al. (2006) defined *support* in Schlossberg's transition theory by the types of support available and the functionality of the support. For the purpose of this research, support examined the role of faculty, campus staff, peers, and kinship networks in the lives of trans college students.

Support for Trans Students. Seelman (2019) believes it is important to examine the roles that faculty and campus administrators play in the lives of trans college students. Those in positions of power often set the tone for the campus, and the actions or inactions of these individuals play a major role for trans students (Linley & Kilgo, 2018). Linley et al. (2016) found that faculty members can provide different forms of support for LGBTQ+ students to create a positive learning environment. Formal support is viewed as using inclusive language, using a student's chosen name and pronouns, confronting language from other students that may seem homophobic or transphobic, and adding LGBTQ+ curriculum to courses. Informal support from faculty is exemplified when

faculty show up to LGBTQ+ events and attend safe space training. According to Linley et al., "Overall, the findings suggest that faculty are in a position to assist LGBTQ students in leaving the margins and seeking the center of the higher education experience" (p. 7).

BrckaLorenz et al. (2018) reported a significant relationship between positive experiences with faculty and trans students participating in learning communities, research with faculty, service-learning projects, internships, and study abroad experiences. This research described the ways trans students were more likely to engage in these activities if they felt supported by faculty. Trans students have reported that when faculty respected a trans student's individuality, students felt more comfortable in the classroom (Duran & Nicolazzo, 2015). Students feel more comfortable when faculty ask for proper gender pronouns and names at the beginning of a class (Duran & Nicolazzo; Seelman, 2019). Spade (2011) believes best practices in the classroom for college instructors are: avoiding roll call with full names before allowing students to self-identify with their preferred names and pronouns, promoting inclusion in the classroom, and not outing students. Wentling (2019) discussed the ways faculty can use their institutional power to help trans students with chosen names and pronouns when campus systems may seem confusing or cumbersome. When these supportive interactions occurred, faculty members were viewed in contrast to faculty and campus administrators who continuously ignored or harassed trans students (Wentling, 2019).

Seelman (2019) recommended how people in power on college campuses should take steps to educate themselves and other students about trans students. Trans students felt much more comfortable around faculty and staff when they were kind to them and

did not tokenize them in front of students or other members of the campus community (Seelman, 2019). Garvey and Rankin (2015b) found that if trans students are unable to construct meaningful relationships with faculty and students, they would be less likely to engage and persist on campus. Linley and Nguyen (2015) believe that while faculty play a large role in academic engagement, student peers are the group with the largest influence over trans students.

Negative experiences with peers can lessen a trans student's sense of belonging on campus and make those students feel alienated. However, peers can also lend support inside the classroom or in cocurricular structures. Pitcher et al. (2018) found that LGBTQ+ resource centers and LGBTQ+ student organizations on campuses offer community for trans students. The resource centers are a physical space where students can feel safe and supported, and the student organizations help connect students, and give them with a sense of belonging (Pitcher et al., 2018). When trans students are connected, they can guide younger trans students who may not know how to find supportive faculty, know which doctors to request at the health care center, or understand how to navigate inclusive policies put in place to formally support them (Pomerleau, 2012).

One of the reasons support on college campuses is so critical to trans students is because they often do not have that support from their biological families. Trans students who feel rejected by these families tend to create a chosen family (Nicolazzo et al., 2017). These chosen families are made up of those they befriend in the resource centers and student organizations (Pitcher et al., 2018). The chosen family is prevalent among LGBTQ+ individuals who have had to create kinships from friends after being rejected by biological family members (Oswald, 2002). These kinship networks are extremely

important for student success and persistence for trans students because they foster a sense of belonging and engagement (Nicolazzo et al., 2017).

Schlossberg's Transition Theory: Focus on *Strategies*

There are four different types of *strategies* that are examined in Schlossberg's transition theory: information-seeking, direct action, inhibition of action, and intrapsychic behavior (Carter et al., 2013). Goodman et al. (2006) define these strategies as coping modes that allow individuals to reduce stress or control their situation. In this research, the strategies discussed the ways trans students navigated and anticipated stressful situations.

Trans Strategies for Persistence. Trans students have to do a lot of labor to protect themselves on college campuses. A large amount of this labor comes in advance of possibly being misnamed and/or a microaggression happening in public on a college campus (Ahmed, 2012; Goldberg et al., 2018; Pryor 2015; Wentling, 2019). This labor is what Wentling (2019) refers to as anticipatory management, which is as a way for trans students to anticipate an incident and either try to manage it in advance or hide their identity to avoid an incident before it occurs (Bilodeau, 2009; Wentling, 2019). Not engaging in self-advocacy in anticipation of issues made trans students even more apprehensive of the consequences of being called the wrong name or pronoun (Singh et al., 2012). Pusch (2005) found trans students often felt vulnerable in classrooms – especially if there was a possibility the class rosters did not have the student's chosen name. Often trans students "dread" when the class roster begins to be read out loud (Seelman, 2019, p. 257).

This anticipation, anxiety, and vulnerability has led to students talking about the work they have to do in classrooms to educate fellow students, staff, and faculty (Nicolazzo, 2017). Often there is tiresome emotional labor trans students feel they need to perform to educate the campus community about trans issues—especially when trans students feel tokenized in the classroom (Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017; Wentling, 2019). Sometimes trans students volunteer to do the work to help educate the campus community and advocate for other trans students (Johnston, 2016). This work includes taking on-campus leadership roles and participating in training sessions to educate the campus community (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005; Pusch 2005; Wentling, 2019).

On top of anticipation and educating others, the strategy of resilience is also important to trans college students. Nicolazzo's (2017) single campus study focused on how nine trans students were resilient in the face of campus challenges. Resilience in Nicolazzo's (2017) work is defined by the college students in this study living as authentically as possible in a college world that does not always accommodate them. Singh et al. (2012) also define resiliency for trans college students by describing the adverse campus situations they have to continuously negotiate to persist as social change agents on campus.

When discussing resilience, Nicolazzo (2017) explained how trans students are not the problem on college campuses by arguing it is actually the college environment that is a problem for trans students. This is an important shift when thinking about how this population of students navigate college life. Instead of examining how trans students cannot persist, the lens has turned to those who have institutional power failing to act to protect them (Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017; Tillapaugh, 2019; Wentling, 2019). Even with

the research turning to the institutions and not the students, it is still the students who must find and negotiate space on college campuses in order to feel safe. The strategies these students use as social agents are critical to who they are, and how they protect themselves. These strategies are also evidence of the strong advocacy work trans students have to do on college campuses (Wentling, 2019).

Summary of Four S's. An exploration of situation, self, support, and strategies can guide research on trans college student persistence. Schlossberg (2011) believes that by defining the Four S's for students, an examination of resources or deficits can be identified. Once they are identified, the Four S's then frame how students cope with change during a transition or event (Goodman et al., 2006). In the case of this research, the Four S's helped explain if or how trans students are able to successfully integrate on a college campus with the use of a preferred name policy. While the preferred name policy is the focus of this research, consideration of a range of higher education policies that are inclusive of trans students is covered in more recent literature on this topic.

Inclusive Higher Education Policies for Trans Students

There is no shortage of research recommending institutional changes to implement policies that make campuses feel safer for trans college students. As stated earlier, a safer campus helps colleges and universities retain trans students. Research has recommended policies and procedures need to make campuses more inclusive for trans individuals in the following areas: creating LGBTQ resource centers (Beemyn et al., 2005; Beemyn, 2019; Seelman, 2014), updating admissions processes (Marine, 2017; Seelman, 2019), educating staff and faculty (Marine and Catalano, 2015; Dugan et al., 2012; Marine, 2017; Pryor, 2015), creating gender neutral bathrooms (Goldberg et al.,

2018; Marine, 2017; Seelman, 2014), making gender neutral housing options available (Nicolazzo & Marine, 2015; Goldberg et al., 2018), creating preferred pronouns and chosen names policies (Beemyn, 2003; Beemyn et al., 2005; Beemyn 2019b; Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017; Goldberg et al., 2018; Seelman, 2019; Spade, 2011; Wentling, 2019), offering accessible locker rooms and changing areas on campus (Marine, 2017; Seelman, 2014), continuing research on college campuses regarding trans students (Marine, 2011), and adding trans experiences to curricula (Beemyn et al., 2005; BrckaLorenz et al., 2018; Garvey et al., 2019; Marine, 2017; Seelman, 2014). These recommendations are based on research conducted over the past fifteen years exploring the experiences of trans students, staff, and faculty.

History of policies and inclusion

In 1996 the University of Iowa became the first postsecondary institution to add gender identity to the university's nondiscrimination statement. By 2004, just twenty colleges had gender identity in their nondiscrimination policies, and only Wesleyan University provided a gender-inclusive housing option (Beemyn, 2019a). The University of Michigan and the University of Vermont were the first schools to make changes to their institutional software to allow students to use a chosen name on campus documents (Beemyn & Brauer, 2015). Both schools began exploring the possibility to let students use chosen names on unofficial documents in 2003. The University of Michigan was the first school to use this policy with the PeopleSoft software and the University of Vermont was the first school to integrate this policy with Banner software (Beemyn & Braur, 2015).

Over the past 15 years, colleges and universities across the country have seen a significant increase in campus policies that protect trans students. According to Beemyn (2019a) more than one thousand colleges now specifically include "gender identity" in nondiscrimination policies. More than 250 colleges now offer gender-inclusive housing, and about that same number of institutions now offer policies that allow students to use chosen names on unofficial college documents (CampusPride, 2019). However, due to legal and financial issues, students can only use chosen names on unofficial school documents, so financial aid information, campus employment information, and official transcripts are not able to show chosen names (Beemyn & Brauer, 2015). The addition of these policies may seem significant because most of the changes have happened recently, but there are still thousands of postsecondary institutions that do not offer any policies at all to protect trans students (Beemyn, 2019a).

Current Studies on Policies and Support in Higher Education

Goldberg et al. (2018) examined trans-affirming resources as a predictor of belonging and campus climate. The study revealed that the top resources and policies trans students want to see on campus are gender-inclusive restrooms, nondiscrimination policies that include gender identity/expression, a university recognized LGBTQ student organization, and changing one's name on campus records without a legal name change. When it came to changing a name on campus records, students in this study noted that even if policies were in place to do this, some of the policies were inefficient and legal names still showed up on rosters and e-mails. One third of the students did not even know if policies existed on their campuses because the marketing of these policies is inconsistent. The students said these inefficient gaps in the policy left them feeling

exposed, and worried about being outed in the classroom. Goldberg and Kuvalanka (2018) found that policies regarding chosen names and pronouns should be more visible and better articulated to students.

Name information on college campuses can reside in several different systems, which can make it hard for students to use a chosen name on records even at schools that offer a preferred name policy (Beemyn & Brauer, 2015; Wentling, 2019) According to Wentling (2019), even colleges with preferred name policies do not always know where the changes will appear, and often students do not even know if their schools offer these policies (Goldberg et al., 2018). Even though a larger number of colleges are using preferred name policies, software systems and implementation can be inconsistent, and may not show up for students in the same ways depending on the departments where they are interacting with institutional software, such as student life, advising, employment, and tutoring (Beemyn & Brauer, 2015; Wentling, 2019). When the student's chosen name does not show up when it is expected, it can be detrimental to learning. Pryor (2015) found that when students were denied the opportunity to use chosen names in the classroom, students would drop courses because they did not feel safe. When misnaming happens in front of a classroom, students can feel alienated, but when faculty respect trans students' chosen names, there is a better chance of positive relationships developing between these students and faculty (Wentling, 2019).

Nicolazzo and Marine's (2015) case study on residence hall policies for trans students revealed that school administrators need to be able to reframe policies and procedures to acknowledge that gender can be dynamic and fluid for students. It is also important to understand that trans students are not one fixed type, and that policies and

practices may not align the same way for each trans student. The study also found that before policies and practices can be implemented and assessed successfully, school administrators need to be able to reflect on their own biases regarding trans students. Finally, reassessment of policies meant to support trans students should always be an option.

When a college or university has inclusive resources and policies, LGBTQ+ students see that as a positive symbolic gesture. In a study of 60 LGBTQ+ students, Pitcher et al. (2018) found LGBTQ+ resource centers serve as symbols that institutions are inclusive and supportive for this population of students. Students view these centers as a reflection of values and campus climate. When schools do not offer supportive policies and programming, students feel that reflects on the school overall, and it may create an environment where students do not feel included or safe. (Pitcher et al., 2018). While previous research reveals trans students feel threatened or unsafe on college campuses, this study explains how some students feel affirmed when resources and policies exist on these campuses. Even if these resources and policies cannot prevent discrimination, they can still demonstrate institutional values that are important to LGBTQ+ students, staff, and faculty (Pitcher et al., 2018).

Tinto (2012b) believes policy implementation could be a theory to practice issue. He argues that what matters in the real world are not theories about retention, "but how they help us address pressing issues of retention and persistence, especially among low-income and underrepresented students" (p. 253). If postsecondary institutions want students to persist, these students need to feel like they belong and matter (Strayhorn, 2019; Schlossberg, 1981). It takes work for institutions that want to be more inclusive.

This requires not only shifts in institutional policy and practice, but shifts in how institutions come to understand LGBTQ+ student issues (Pryor, 2018). Universities hold one of the keys to dismantling cisnormative structures on campus through policy implementation (Goldberg & Kuvalanka, 2018). Research shows that just the presence of policies and practices can make trans students feel supported on college campuses (Pitcher et al., 2018). Unfortunately, very little empirical research has been done to assess policies that help trans students after they have been enacted.

Summary

This chapter examined the literature on social and psychosocial retention and persistence models along with the literature on student identity development. The complexity of these issues is viewed through the limited literature on identity development and persistence for trans college students, and then connected to literature on policies for these students. Over the past fifteen years, studies on trans college students have shown that not only do these students exist on campus, but they are also resilient and strategic when it comes to advocating for themselves. The development of university-wide policies and supports has taken some of the burden off of trans students, but research is still needed to explore if and how trans students persist after policy implementation.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the overall design of my research study. First, I review the purpose of this study and the research questions that guided my work. Then I explain why applying qualitative methods to my research yielded particularly useful and nuanced results. Next, I respond to the five questions Denzin and Lincoln (2011) believe researchers should answer when undertaking a qualitative study: Who or what was studied? What strategies of inquiry were used? How did the design connect to the paradigm being used? What method and tools were used to gather data and analyze it? How did research materials allow the researcher to speak to praxis or change? In addition to answering these questions, I discuss my subjectivity, my positionality, my ethics, and how I made this study trustworthy as well as rigorous.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

This study explored how a preferred name change policy at an urban university in the Midwest affected the lived experiences of trans students particularly in terms of

identity and meaning making. According to Haverkamp and Young (2007), qualitative research emphasizes situated understanding, where research questions require "direct attention to the setting or phenomenon being targeted for exploration" (p. 281). With this in mind, the following research questions directed this study:

1. At a university that recently implemented a preferred name change policy, how does the ability to formally use chosen names affect how trans students narrate and understand their experiences in both learning and social environments on campus?
2. In what ways (if any) does a formalized institutional preferred name change policy contribute to identity development and persistence within the context of engagement, sense of belonging, mattering, and validation for trans students using a chosen name on campus?

Theoretical Framework

My research employed two different theoretical models. The first, Tinto's (1975, 1993) model of student departure, evaluated the extent to which identity moves along different stages for trans traditional and nontraditional students with specific emphasis on the impact of this preferred name change policy. The three stages in Tinto's model are: separation, transition, and incorporation. I reframed this prior work to evaluate how trans students move through a persistence model, so I could understand their opportunity for academic success. My research examined the participants' perception of the social and academic life on a college campus before the preferred name change policy is implemented, which aligned with the separation stage. I examined what the new experience looked like for the students once they transitioned to their chosen name on

campus. Finally, my analysis of the data provided insight into whether the name change policy helped these students reach the incorporation stage on campus where they could feel comfortable in both academic and social settings on campus, thus increasing their chances of persistence at the institution.

I examined how students navigated from transition to incorporation using Schlossberg's transition theory (1981). Here, I explored the students' levels of engagement, sense of belonging, mattering, and validation while reflecting upon how the policy shaped or is shaped by the four S's of transition theory: situation, self, strategies, and support. As the participants discussed their experiences with the policy, their situation, sense of self, coping strategies, and support both on and off campus were analyzed to better understand if or how students were able to move to an incorporation stage where they have a better chance to persist.

Rationale for using Qualitative Methods

I used a qualitative approach in order to: create a complex, detailed understanding of how students narrate their experiences with the policy; empower trans students to share their stories; and understand the academic setting the trans students in this study navigate (Creswell, 2013). While quantitative research can calculate the number of students who persisted at the university and also used the policy, I wanted to know how these students described their lived experiences on the GLSU campus, and relate that to their individual persistence at the university. Qualitative research allowed me to focus on understanding how humans make sense of their lives, attribute meaning, and interpret their experiences (Merriam, 2009).

Paradigmatic Considerations and Philosophical Assumptions

I approached this research from a social constructivist perspective. According to Creswell (2013), a social constructivist approach involves individuals developing subjective meanings about their experiences. This allows the researcher to see a complexity of views, and then the researcher and participant co-construct meaning through their relationship based on the experiences described by the participant (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012). Creswell (2013) describes these experiences as ones that are constructed both socially and historically, and are formed through social interaction with others.

The chosen paradigm of a study attends to four philosophical assumptions that connect to the research design: ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology (Creswell, 2013). Ontology explores the nature of reality and the multiple realities of researchers and participants. Epistemology refers to how knowledge is known and what counts as knowledge. Axiology honors individual values. Methodology is employed in relation to the philosophical assumptions to conduct qualitative research. All of these assumptions change based on the chosen paradigm for a study (Creswell, 2013).

Researchers using a social constructivist paradigm rely on the participant's views to generate and develop theories or a pattern of understanding (Creswell, 2013). In regard to ontology and epistemology, what the students in my research experienced was based on how the campus community treated the chosen name of the trans student, and how the campus community and students interacted. The participants' perceptions of those interactions were formed through a history of social negotiations on the college campus, and in the participants' lives based on their gender and chosen name. As a social

constructivist researcher, I made sense of their experiences because of my own historical and social experiences, and together we constructed knowledge surrounding their reality of the preferred name change policy.

Axiology describes the role of values, and what values are being brought to the study. One example in this particular study of the values that were honored using the social constructivist paradigm was to make sure all participants and the researcher use chosen names and correct pronouns during the interviews. Values for this study also included the importance of a safe space for all participants provided by letting participants choose the interview space where they felt the most comfortable. For all five participants that initial space for the first set of interviews was in my office.

The final philosophical assumption is methodology, and with social constructivism, this is more of a literary style of writing with an inductive method of themes based on consensus (Creswell, 2013). According to Hayes and Singh (2012), the methodology in a social constructivist paradigm reveals how the research problems are collaboratively determined between the researcher and participant. This is why those who conduct social constructivist research enter a study with foreshadowed problems, "a qualitative version of hypotheses in quantitative research where the researcher enters a setting with topics to explore" (Hayes & Singh, 2012, p. 423).

Methodology

The methodology for social constructivism lends itself to the co-construction of storytelling, which aligns well with a narrative methodological approach. I chose narrative inquiry to bring forth the stories of my students in order to get a better understanding of their experience with the preferred name policy. Jones and Abes (2013)

believe the purpose of narrative inquiry is to understand human experiences through stories told by participants. Chase (2011) defined narrative inquiry as:

> a distinct form of discourse: as meaning making through the shaping or ordering of experiences, a way of understanding one's own or others' actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, of connecting and seeing consequences of actions and events over time (p. 421).

My research questions focused on the way identity intersected with educational policies. A narrative inquiry is the best way to bring forth the experiences of the students because of the way they made meaning of these experiences due to contextual factors such as the preferred name policy. The ability to make meaning specifically comes out of this type of inquiry because "thinking, perception, imagination, and moral decision making are based on narrative structure" (Ben-Ari, 1998, p. 155).

According to Clandinin and Rosiek (2007), the study of experience is the most defining feature of narrative inquiry. In order to undertake a narrative inquiry and understand the experience of the participants, three elements were explored in relation to the purpose of the study: the personal and social; the past, present, and future; and the place or situation (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). The nature of this study required that I attend to these elements as I examined trans students' academic and social experiences. In this study, my questions addressed: the personal and social aspects of the students' lives in regard to the preferred name policy, the lived experiences of the students before, during, and after the use of the policy, and the role of the institution and campus environment in the identity development of the student.

Using a social constructivist paradigm with a narrative inquiry approach allowed me to co-create stories with my students. Researchers do not find narratives, but they help to create the narratives with the participants based on the collection of data, and how transcription of interviews can develop different types of stories (Riessman, 2008). These stories develop because of the relationship between the researcher and the participant that involves both parties learning and changing during their time together (Creswell, 2013). The mutual learning and changing happens because researchers doing narrative inquiry create a setting in which the participants feel included and are able to tell their story while developing a sense of self. Polkinghorne (1988) believes the narrative approach often reveals how the sense of self develops through these stories.

Wentling's (2019) study that defined anticipatory management for trans college students used narrative inquiry. Wentling believed first-person narrative honors the voice and insight of the student, and how the student views themselves in relationship to the college environment. Ashton (2019) explored gender identity and meaning making for trans college students using a narrative inquiry because the narratives gave a voice to trans students who have historically been silenced in research. Holstein & Gubrium (2000) argue that narrative analysis is predicated on the assumption that selves are constructed by interacting with various discursive environments. In their study examining traditionally heterogendered institutions, Preston and Hoffman (2015) use narrative inquiry because they believe, "institutions, such as colleges and universities, offer various discursive environments that set the conditions of possibility for the construction of self" (p. 69). The Wentling (2019), Ashton (2019), and Preston and Hoffman (2015) studies exemplify how narrative inquiry is well-suited for a study on the experiences of trans

college students who are using a policy enacted in a discursive environment, such as an urban public university.

Creswell (2013) believes narrative research is best for explaining the detailed stories of a small amount of people. This is done by spending a considerable amount of time with the participant(s),and collecting data through multiple types of information. Narrative inquiry is set apart from other methodological approaches because of the emphasis on stories and lived experiences (Jones et al., 2014). The researcher takes on an active role by putting the stories and lived experiences into a framework. One of the ways this is done is by "restorying" (Creswell, 2013, p. 74).

Restorying is a process of reorganizing the stories of the participants into a framework that assists in analysis and enables the researcher to put the stories into chronological order. The emphasis on sequence sets narrative research apart from other approaches (Creswell, 2013). Sequencing was important to this study because I worked with a linear theoretical framework that investigated students separating, transitioning, and incorporating based on the implementation of an institutional policy. In this study I spent time with individuals in order to learn their stories, so that I could re-story the experience they described based on the conceptual framework presented by Tinto (1975, 1993).

Research Methods

Every methodology has specific methods and tools that researchers use to conduct qualitative inquiry. In this section I describe how my sampling criteria and procedures, sample size and demographics, data collection, and data analysis were consistent with a constructivist narrative study.

Sampling Criteria and Procedure

In my study of academic experiences for trans students who use a preferred name change policy were examined, two criteria were established for sampling: the student identified as trans, and the student used the preferred name change policy at the university. Establishing criteria is important to the data collection methods. I wanted to be able to match my sample up with who can best describe the experience of the policy (Jones, et al., 2014).

The criteria made this sampling purposeful and criterion based. According to Creswell (2013), purposeful sampling was put into place because I was looking for students who could purposely inform an understanding of the name change policy. Purposeful sampling is an element in qualitative research that distinguishes it from quantitative research, which uses random sampling that allows results to be generalized (Patton, 2002). The goal of qualitative research is not to produce results that are generalizable, but to find participants that have insight into issues that are imperative to the specific study (Patton, 2002). Criterion sampling is an example of purposeful sampling. I employed purposeful criterion sampling because I wanted participants who met the important predetermined criterion, which is important to studies that evaluate programs and policies (Hayes & Singh, 2012).

After my prospectus was approved, the Office of Institutional Equity (OIE), the office in charge of the policy at the university, sent me a list of students at the university who used the policy. From there I sent out emails to students who used the policy. The emails explained my research, and they invited the students to participate in my study (Appendix 2). After going through the responses, I filtered out the students who did not

meet the criteria, and then contacted the remaining students to gauge their interest in being involved with this research. I let them know this would entail us meeting several times over the course of an academic semester. At the time of my first outreach to the students I was obviously unaware that half of the semester would be remote for all students at the institution because of COVID-19.

Sample Size and Demographics

Rigorous qualitative narrative studies involving only two trans college students have been produced in the past. Johnston (2015) conducted a narrative study on two trans students who reflected on gender and stigma on their college campus. While this study produced results that thoroughly described gender discrimination on a college campus for these two students, it was important to me to have five participants involved in this study. In narrative research the sample size does not have to be large, but it is important to spend a large amount of time with each participant so that the narratives are rich (Creswell, 2013). I spent an hour with each participant in March 2020 while we were still on campus, and then I followed up with each participant after the campus went remote due to COVID-19. Our correspondence was done via phone, text, and email. Due to the circumstances, some students had more time for me than others. For example, Ana who struggled with remote learning communicated with me via a few short text messages. On the other hand, Ricky, who described himself as bored during remote learning, spent an hour with me on the phone.

Setting

The setting for this study was an urban public university in the Midwest, GLSU. This university has an enrollment of 16,000 undergraduate and graduate students. The

student population is 64% White, 17.3% African-American, and 5.7% Hispanic. The university is considered to be age diverse with only 39.6% of students in the 18 to 21 age bracket, compared to the national average of 60% (College Factual, 2019).

In regard to the LGBTQ+ community at GLSU, the school has had an eventful four years. Since 2016, an LGBTQ+ Resource Center has opened on campus, gender neutral bathrooms have been created in several campus buildings, gender inclusive dorms have been added, and a preferred name change policy has been put in place. The university hired the first-ever staff person to work specifically with LGTBQ+ students beginning in the spring 2020 semester. Unfortunately, over that four-year span there have also been incidents of harassment against the LGBTQ+ student population. One incident in particular was so hostile and handled so poorly by campus administrators that the university had to have a town hall that included the then-president and other top administrators from around campus.

Remote Learning at GLSU

The second week of March 2020 was spring break for students and staff at GLSU. Because of COVID-19 students were granted a second week of spring break. After that second week of spring break, students, staff, and faculty would return to the campus due to COVID-19. All courses and staff offices on the campus went virtual for the remainder of the spring 2020 and the entirety of the summer 2020 semester. Courses were taught over zoom or using the on-line learning system, Blackboard. Students went from learning in person to learning via zoom and becoming more dependent on email and the email chat function called Teams. It was a very disruptive period for not only GLSU students but students all over the country who had to return home from campuses and begin

learning remotely. The transition felt so jarring to students at GLSU that administrators allowed the students to retroactively use a pass/fail grading system. In this system, their grade point average would not be impacted, and a grade of D would be considered passing. In the previous pass/fail system students had to earn a C or higher to pass a course. Many students took advantage of this in the spring and summer 2020 semesters because of the way their learning and lives were negatively affected due to remote learning and a lack of engagement with the campus community.

Data Collections Method

Semi-structured interviews were the primary form of data collection for this research. Interviews are used to gather data that cannot be observed (Patton, 2002). According to Galletta (2013), characteristics of semi-structured interviews reflect variation in use of questions, prompts, and accompanying tools to draw participants more fully into the topic by incorporating both open-ended and more theoretically driven questions. In this format each interview question is clearly connected to the purpose of the research, each interview question reflects the researcher's deliberate progression toward a fully in-depth exploration of the study, and the objective is to guide a participant in conveying an account of an experience as it relates to the topic of study (Galletta, 2013). In narrative inquiry, the experience is the most defining feature of the study (Cladinin & Rosiek, 2007).

Interview Questions

When constructing my semi-structured interview questions, I followed the philosophy provided by Riessman (2008) who believes the goal in narrative interviewing is to generate detailed accounts rather than brief answers or general statements. To stay

true to the constructivist approach, questions were broad and general so students could construct meaning through discussion (Creswell, 2013).

I broke my interview questions (Appendix 1) up using the framework of Tinto (1975, 1993) who believes there are three distinct stages to academic persistence for students: separation, transition, and incorporation. His theory was used to frame my interview questions and relate them back to my research questions. When exploring separation, I asked about student interactions on campus before students used the preferred name policy. When exploring the transition stage, I asked about the process of using the preferred name policy. Finally, when exploring the incorporation stage, I asked about the experience of using the preferred name policy and the positive and negative outcomes from using the policy. Even though this theoretical framework guided my questions, Riessman (2008) believes researchers have to learn to give up control of the interview, and be okay straying away from theoretical foci in search of the story the participant has to tell.

Data Collection

The first set of interviews were conducted in my office on the GLSU campus. These interviews were done in March 2020, the week before the students left for spring break. This was also the week the university announced remote learning would take place for the rest of the semester due to COVID-19. The following month was frantic for staff, faculty, and students, and it was hard to get in touch with some of my students. I decided to reach out via email to all the students with a list of questions I wanted to follow up with after transcribing the first set of interviews. Three of the students used this for follow up. A fourth student and I talked on the phone for an hour in May 2020. A fifth

student (Ana) replied to some of my messages via text, but never followed up about the questions. I did have one participant respond back to the second set of email questions in what he described as a "flowing manner" by typing like he talks to make the responses sound more organic. I greatly appreciated his forethought on those responses. Whether or not the students were able to give me a full response for the second round of interviews, they all still received a $50 Amazon gift card. The gift cards were provided through a research grant I was awarded in April 2020.

Interview Question Development

As previously mentioned, questions for the first interviews were developed following the framework of Tinto's student departure theory. The second interview questions were follow up questions I had after transcribing the first interviews. This second set of questions also asked about their remote learning experience in combination with the preferred name policy. My prospectus would not have been able to predict remote learning in the spring 2020 semester, but I still decided to see how remote learning impacted their engagement. The last question I asked in the second set of interviews was about advice the participants would give to incoming students at GLSU. I wanted to see what the participants prioritized on campus, and how they felt validated through this question. The answers led to insight about identity and validation.

Data Analysis Method

I used Saldaña's (2016) codes to theory model to analyze the data from the interviews. The model relies on analytic memos to help make sense of the data through reflection. According to Saldaña (2016), "Analytic memo writing documents reflection on: your coding process and code choices, how the process of inquiry is taking shape; and

the emergent patterns, categories and subcategories, themes, and concepts in your data--all possibly leading toward theory" (p. 44). Through the memoing, codes began to emerge in what is considered first cycle coding (Saldaña, 2016). This led me to second cycle coding as codes were analyzed, classified, prioritized, and conceptualized. Once codes were selected, they were connected to categories that lead to narrative themes. Throughout this entire process, memo writing--both reflective and analytical--was critical to my analysis.

Saldaña's (2016) model was used in conjunction with analysis that is specific to narrative inquiry. As mentioned earlier, narrative inquiry is set apart from other approaches because the researcher re-storys the narratives of the participants. The researcher plays a key role in this analysis because they have to highlight what is worthy of the story (Jones, et al., 2014). In order to highlight the findings, I used a supportive voice. According to Jones, et al. (2014), "When using a supportive voice, the narrative researcher foregrounds the participants' voices" (p. 86). This voice allows the researcher to not dwell on the process of the research, but to focus on the story being told (Chase, 2005). These highlighted voices and excerpts led to categories and themes that emerged from the data that could validate the findings of this study.

Researcher as Instrument

In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument used to collect and analyze data in the study (Patton, 2002). Researchers have to be reflexive about their subjectivity and positionality to ensure the trustworthiness and authenticity of the study (Creswell, 2013; Hayes & Singh, 2012; Stewart, 2005). In this section I will be describing my subjectivity, positionality, and the ways I established trustworthiness in this study.

Subjectivity

I consistently examined my subjectivity to give credibility to my research. I meet all of my sampling criteria as a trans student who uses the preferred name change policy at GLSU. As a trans graduate student who studied post-secondary trans students, Nicolazzo (2013) believed her research lived in the borderlands as defined by Anzaldúa (2007). The borderlands according to Anzaldúa is a constant state of transition home to the prohibited and marginalized folks who go through the confines of "normal" (p. 25). It is in these borderlands that research and researcher identity shape analysis. As Nicolazzo (2013) stated, "I have come to recognize that I am researching trans* students in postsecondary education into existence, including myself" (p. 206).

I too fall into this framework of researcher who shared commonalities with my participants. The more my students' stories gave depth to their experiences with the name change policy, I naturally also saw parts of myself in this study. Understanding that and being self-aware was a large part of knowing how to situate myself as a researcher. In this study, my subjectivity was both a strength and a challenge, and I constantly examined it through the use of reflexive writing, checking in with colleagues, and member checking with the students. According to Hayes and Singh (2012), member checking is an "ongoing consultation with participants to test the goodness of fit of developing findings as well as final reports" (p. 426). I contacted critical friends after both interviews and transcription to talk about possible issues that could arise. I memoed all these instances as I thought reflectively about my experience. The important thing to understand about subjectivity is that it is fluid. My subjectivity changed throughout the study depending on my own experiences as a person and a researcher. According to

Stewart (2005), researchers evolve over time, and it is important to continuously examine this evolution. Memoing was a critical aspect of my work to ensure I am always reflecting on my subjectivity. For example, there were many instances while the students spoke when I found myself nodding along both as an affirming listener, and also as someone who had experienced what they were describing. I paid close attention to these times during transcription and noted them in my memos. Jones, et al. (2014) believe researchers need to discover both their research subject and their sense of self in qualitative work to ensure worthy research.

Positionality

I have interacted with each of the participants in this research outside of this study as an advisor or instructor. Hayes and Singh (2012) identify this as "multiple relationships," which means that I served more than one role with the participants that could possibly blur boundaries (p. 87). These different relationships had an impact on my interactions during this research. Some students were more accessible to me because I had worked with them previously in social situations, so I had their personal information. I lost contact with Ana because she was having academic issues, and she did not want to discuss these issues with me because I was her academic advisor. I spent a good amount of time memoing about this relationship with her because as both the person running this study and her academic advisor, I wanted to see her succeed at GLSU. Unfortunately, it seemed that she believed if she reached out to me about the research, she would also have to discuss her academic issues.

Trustworthiness

It was important that I maintained criteria establishing trustworthiness in my analysis. For the purpose of creating good qualitative work, I used the 15 criteria provided by Braun and Clarke (2013). The criteria apply to five different aspects of the research: transcription, coding, analysis, overall research, and written report. Here is the list of the 15 criteria:

1. The data have been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail, and the transcripts have been checked against the tapes for 'accuracy'
2. Each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process
3. Themes have not been generated from a few vivid examples (an anecdotal approach), but instead the coding process has been thorough, inclusive, and comprehensive
4. All relevant extracts for each theme have been collated
5. Themes have been checked against each other and back to the original data set
6. Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive
7. Data have been analyzed- interpreted, made sense of- rather than just paraphrased or described
8. Analysis and data match each other- the extracts illustrate the analytic claims
9. Analysis tells a convincing and well-organized story about the data and topic

10. A good balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts is provided overall

11. Enough time has been allocated to complete all phases of the analysis adequately, without rushing a phase or giving it a once-over-lightly written report

12. The assumptions about, and specific approach to, thematic analysis are clearly explicated

13. There is a good fit between what you claim you do, and what you show you have done- i.e. described method and reported analysis are consistent

14. The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis

15. The researcher is positioned as active in the research process; themes do not just emerge (Braun & Clark, 2013, p. 287)

I made sure that each of these criteria were addressed in my research. I did this by member checking, meeting with critical friends, memoing, meeting with my committee chair, and going over concerns with my methodologist. My reflexive memos on these criteria served as an audit trail throughout the study.

Narrative Inquiry Quality Criteria

On top of the standards held to all qualitative researchers to produce authentic and trustworthy research, narrative researchers have additional considerations. Narrative researchers should do the following to ensure a good study: focus on a small amount of people, develop a chronology that connects different aspects of a story, tell a story that

reports what was said, and bring themselves into the study reflexively (Creswell, 2013). In addition to my critical friends who reviewed this work, I made sure to use a secondary reviewer who had previously conducted narrative research to make sure I was doing rigorous narrative analysis in this study.

Ethics

According to Chase (1996), "All research based on in-depth interviews raises ethical and process issues, but narrative research demands that we pay special attention to participants' vulnerability and analysts' interpretive authority" (p. 45). Josselin (2007) believes that every aspect of narrative inquiry is impacted by the ethics of the research relationship, and this becomes a conundrum as the researcher is torn between the relationship between the participant and the relationship between the scholarly community. Researchers need to attend to the well-being of participants, and that can sometimes conflict with the interpretation of the scholarly obligations of the researcher. The best way to manage this issue is to continuously reflect on and recognize the ethical dilemmas that can be present in narrative research (Josselin, 2007). Chase (1996) believes we can also overcome this with member checking to make sure participants feel comfortable with the story being reported on their behalf. I checked in with my participants at least three different times after meeting the initial time. Some participants and I interacted even more than that when I had a quick follow up question, or I just wanted to check in on the students because of the strange academic circumstances.

Using narrative inquiry required me to gather data "from a deeply human, genuine, empathic, and respectful relationship to the participant about significant and meaningful aspects of the participant's life" (Josselin, 2007, p. 539). It was important that

my consent form reflected this understanding. Not only did I outline my role as a narrative researcher in my consent form, I also made sure resources were available to my students in case they may need them, such as contact information for Counseling Services and LGBTQ+ Student Services Office at the university.

Participant Privacy

I used different tactics to make sure I was staying true to my IRB consent form to protect the confidentiality of my participants. Those tactics were: giving participant's pseudonyms, storing the pseudonym code sheet and consent forms in a locked cabinet in my office, and making sure that interview transcripts will be maintained on a password protected USB. I also let participants pick out where they wanted to be interviewed to protect their privacy in public. As mentioned previously, each student chose my office for their initial campus interview.

Critical Friends

Throughout this chapter, I mention my critical friends who helped me with my subjectivity, positionality, and trustworthiness. I chose these critical friends because of the value they brought to my research. Three critical friends were from my own doctoral cohort, and they were able to help me stay in the moment because we were all going through the moment together. I also chose two alumni from the Urban Education Doctoral program who did qualitative research for their dissertations. On top of these five people who have conducted doctoral research, I chose an alum of GLSU who had used the preferred name policy. They were able to give me a critical eye on how I framed the participant's narratives. This was important because I never wanted my own interactions with the policy to blur their stories.

Conclusion

This chapter documented how I conducted this study. I followed a constructivist paradigm using a narrative approach. As the instrument in my research I conducted semi-structured interviews to gather data that was analyzed using a codes to categories to themes approach with a supportive narrative voice. My subjectivity and positionality were continuously reflected on through the use of memos to ensure trustworthy research. My objective was to share the narratives of these students to better inform the current policy in place to see if changes are necessary to help trans students at this university. The narratives interpreted through a social constructivist lens tied together the collected stories into necessary data that will be used to make recommendations for the current preferred name policy at GLSU based on the experiences of the students as presented in Chapter 4. The use of the direct quotes increased the trustworthiness of the interpretation. They were taken from face-to-face interviews, emails, texts, and phone conversations that took place between March and June 2020. These three months were marked by both remote learning because of COVID-19 and protests for racial justice spurred on by the death of George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis Police Department.

CHAPTER IV

NARRATIVES

The purpose of this chapter is to share the stories of five trans students using a preferred name policy at an urban public university in the Midwest, Great Lakes State University (GLSU). These stories focus on both using the preferred name policy and the experiences the students had navigating the institution as trans individuals. This narrative analysis exemplified how the policy itself and the institution as a whole need to improve when it comes to working with trans students. It also explored identity and meaning making for these students regarding if they feel like they matter or feel marginalized on the GLSU campus. The order of presentation here is the order in which I met with the participants. The following research questions guided the collection of these stories:

1. At a university that recently implemented a preferred name change policy, how does the ability to formally use chosen names affect how trans students narrate and understand their experiences in both learning and social environments on campus?

2. In what ways (if any) does a formalized institutional preferred name change policy contribute to identity development and persistence within the context of engagement, sense of belonging, mattering, and validation for trans students using a chosen name on campus?

Table 4.1 Participant Information

Name	Pronouns	Student Type	Admit Type	Time at School	Time Using Policy
Nick	He/Him	Traditional	1st Year	Four Years	One Year
Parker	He/They	Traditional	1st Year	Two Years	One Year
Tanner	He/Him	Traditional	1st Year	Four Years	Two Years
Ricky	He/Him	Traditional	1st Year	Two Years	One Year
Ana	She/Her	Nontraditional	Transfer	Two Years	One Year

Table 4.1 gives identifying information for all five participants. Their name is a pseudonym used for this study. Their pronouns are the pronouns they use for themselves. Student type details whether the student would be defined as traditional or nontraditional. Admit type describes the way the student entered GLSU. In this category 1st year means that the student entered as a freshman, and transfer indicates that the student transferred in from another postsecondary institution. Time at school is how many years the student has attended GLSU, and time using policy describes how long the student has used the preferred name policy.

The five narratives put forward in this chapter are meant to depict the meaning making experiences of these students, which helped them understand how they perceived their value at an institution that recently implemented a preferred name policy. Polkinghorne (1988) believes the narrative approach often reveals how the sense of self develops through these stories. According to Clandinin and Rosiek (2007), the study of experience is the most defining feature of narrative inquiry. In order to undertake a narrative inquiry and understand the experience of the participants, three elements are explored in relation to the purpose of the study: the personal and social; the past, present, and future; and the place or situation (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). The nature of this study required that I attend to these elements as I examined the participants' academic and social experiences.

In a narrative inquiry the researcher takes on an active role by putting the stories of participants and their lived experiences into a framework. One of the ways this is done is by restorying, which is a process of reorganizing the stories of the participants into a framework that assists in analysis and enables the researcher to put the stories into chronological order (Creswell, 2013). The emphasis on sequence sets narrative research apart from other approaches. Sequencing is important to this study because I am working with a linear theoretical framework that investigates students separating from a previous identity, transitioning away from those identities, and trying to incorporate who they are into the university community based on the implementation of an institutional policy. Hence, I have restoried what was told to me in order to convey the experiences of the students in a linear, chronological sequence.

Researchers choose what type of voice they want to use when telling the participant's story. According to Chase (2005), there are three different voices narrative researchers can use: authoritative, supportive, and interactive voices. There can be some overlap between the voice the researcher decides to use. For the most part, the voice I used to relay the participant's stories was a supportive voice, which to the extent possible, placed my voice in the background (Chase, 2005).

Even though I prioritized the voice of the participant, I did think it was important to discuss my positionality and multiple relationships with each student at the beginning of each story. The multiple roles I have in the participants' lives will show how we are connected through more than just this research. According to Hayes and Singh (2012), multiple relationships show blurring boundaries and power dynamics. Because I meet all of my sampling criteria, it is important to be as transparent as possible regarding my role in the lives of the participants, who are students at the same higher education institution where I am employed.

In March 2020 each participant came to my office for an interview, and they spent an hour with me discussing the preferred name policy at GLSU and their overall experiences at the university. The following week the university was shut down due to COVID-19, so I had to follow up with texts, email, and phone conversations. Three of the students e-mailed me, one student texted with me, and I talked on the phone with another student. They all also confirmed the transcripts I had sent out to them. These are their stories.

Nick: "I don't want to have to like fight against my own academic system to try to treat people with human decency."

Nick is a senior at GLSU and is part of a campus organization called the Queer Student Union (QSU) that I advise. We have known one another for about a year, but we did not have much interaction until about six months ago. At that time, we started working together more in the organization, and I let him know about my research on the preferred name policy. He quickly volunteered to be a participant. He thought it was important to participate because he feels invested in social issues and wants to "improve awareness around language and space usage."

Nick chose GLSU because he wanted to start transitioning, and he felt it would be easier to do away from his hometown, which is located over an hour away from the GLSU campus. He said, "Part of the reason to come to GLSU was also somewhat influenced by just coming to a different city, different space where I knew none of my peers were going to be following me." However, he found out not having that support in place when he first got to campus would actually make transitioning more difficult. He kept using his legal name because he did not want to be ostracized without support networks, "I didn't really feel safe or comfortable being like completely isolated, because I also didn't have a social or any support groups." He started becoming more comfortable as he met other queer students on campus. Then he began using the preferred name policy his junior year. He felt like he was not authentically himself when he started at GLSU, but also didn't know at the time what that meant for him, so he put off using a name that felt more comfortable because there were other pressing needs as well:

I was more focused on the essentials of like finding somewhere to live, finding

> resources so unfortunately for me that also meant putting off some parts of like personal growth and willingness to, you know, exist in college. But I was pretty excited about seeing the gender neutral housing option when I was originally planning to stay on campus, and I was like: "Oh that's cool, diversity! We're cool with the queers...nice." [Nick pretended to do a little cheer in my office when he said that].

Nick's excitement about the resources in place at GLSU, like gender neutral housing, pushed him to use other resources. Soon Nick became engaged with the QSU and started hanging out in the LGBTQ+ Center. These experiences created a support network for Nick that allowed him to begin to think about transitioning and "start broaching the topic to like-minded people."

Part of the transition process for Nick was using the preferred name policy at GLSU. He said, "Prior to actively using the policy, I didn't even inform other people about my preferred name." The policy helped Nick feel more comfortable using his name on campus. He remembers thinking, "This is cool, this is progressive, this is good that we're starting to do this, and I thought it was, in theory, a lot more comprehensive than it actually is." He felt like a policy in place would be more complete than it turned out to be.

The initial issue Nick had with the policy was that there was some confusion about how to actually use it. He said he had a lot of questions, and there was not much direction other than to send an email to OIE. He did not know if that email was to ask for permission to use the policy or if that is all he had to do to use the policy:

> I wish it was just something like much more seemingly accessible kind of like the

> silkscreen of it being a policy, and like something big and abstract kind of like taken away and just like: "Yeah, just send an email and like if you need something done we'll do it, and it might take a little bit of time depending on our workload, but it's really simple, easy and quick." Whereas just reading through the policy you're like: "Oh wow, okay, what do I need to do?" And then they're like: "Just email OIE." "Where's the email?" And then they were like: "Just email." And it's like: "What do I email, like, what is the format of the email that I need to send?" [Nick's voice kept getting louder with each question he asked].

He remarked that once the confusion was cleared up after he got a confirmation email from OIE, the process was easy for him and he received a notice that he could go and get a new ID card.

Unfortunately for Nick, the initial change in his name was only made to his middle name and not his first name. The incorrect change was communicated to the ID card office, and that process proved difficult for him because the card office had to wait to get official confirmation from OIE. He said he thought about not getting a new ID card, but the benefits were just so great that he waited in the ID card office until the error was corrected. At GLSU students have their bus pass on their ID card and that made a big difference for Nick:

> I don't drive or have a license so having my preferred name on there is pretty affirming because I'm not like flashing the [bus] drivers my dead name non-stop when I'm pulling it out. I might be looking at an old photo of me that like I think is kind of corny and stupid and I don't really like it, but at least my name is on there. [Nick pulled out the old photo and laughed at it].

Nick opted not to pay the $25 fee to have his picture updated, but having the updated name on the ID has helped him feel validated each time he gets on the bus.

Now that Nick has started transitioning and using the policy he has been reflecting a lot about the relationships he has with staff and faculty at GLSU:

> It's starting to dawn on me that all of these people especially because I didn't start transitioning until within the last year that like all these people are going to know my dead name, they're going to know me as a woman, and I'm going to have to deal with that on my professional record because all these people are going to be professional resources for me. And between, there not being a policy in place to like kind of like guide interactions and things like that and trainings and whatnot that I'm kind of just relying on the quality of this person's sense of moral code, social justice and ethics and how they feel about me as a person, and if I live up to their ideals of the male gender, a slew of reasons, and that has made me panic on several occasions, less so now because you know, I'm started to identify more masculine.

These thoughts about how staff and faculty view him made him question if he even wants to continue building some of these relationships that could help him professionally in the future. He said he keeps thinking, "People say if you want to build up a really strong resume like build rapport with the professors, and I'm like, 'Do I really want to?'"

When I asked Nick to reflect on positive changes he has seen and felt since using the policy, he mentioned that he loves seeing his name in Blackboard, saying "Seeing it also sometimes it'll give me like a little kick like 'Yeah that's my name! There it is!' [He raised his hands in excitement]. The policy changes names in Blackboard, an online

learning portal for students, but it does not change names in CampusConnect, which is used by both students and faculty for almost every activity on campus, such as rosters, grades, transcripts, and scheduling. Because the policy changes names in Blackboard, an online learning portal, but not in CampusConnect, Nick had to email the professors initially through Blackboard, which he said, "confirms and reaffirms that name and like tries to like make sure people like use it and know it like that."

Nick feels like the more faculty see his name in Blackboard, the more likely they will be to use his name even if the course does not primarily use Blackboard. He also feels like seeing his name in Blackboard gives him more ownership of his academic career. He said this feeling quickly goes away when he sees his dead name still appear on vital campus resources, such as CampusConnect (the system used by students for campus activities, such as: registration, financial aid, grades, and degree progress) even though he is using the preferred name policy:

> To see my dead name other places on like resources and things like that it's kind of just sort of like: "Get the memo please! Come on, catch up." And it doesn't make me so much more like unwilling to use those resources partially because of how integral they are, and it's sort of like another negotiation. It's like do you want to use this really important resource or do you want to stop seeing your dead name: pick one!

Interactions around campus have also brought mixed feelings for Nick depending on who he is working with. He said some instructors still use rosters from CampusConnect and continuously use his legal name even when he has asked them not to. However, he has noticed some positive changes this semester with instructors crossing

out names on rosters or using excel spreadsheets with updated names instead of rosters pulled from CampusConnect. Instructors use CampusConnect for most of their activities including attendance rosters. He appreciates that some instructors do understand students may have different names than what appears in CampusConnect, but he thinks it would be great if they could just use the roster from Blackboard in which student's chosen names are listed instead of legal names. He had an experience with an instructor who brought up how much they liked Nick's name, and Nick felt that was, "Really cool and really affirming." Nick also believes his STEM major has made a difference with faculty interactions.

> It's STEM so for the most part what I've been taking biology wise and mathematics and environmental science, a lot of those classes are kind of focused away from like individual sort of like issues so there's not even like really a platform for people to kind of like slip up on things.

Nick said he has several strategies for reminding people of his chosen name because there are so many places where it does not show up on campus resources. He uses his chosen name when he signs off on email, and he also tries to talk to instructors in person to introduce himself. He read on internet message boards that those are two good ways to get faculty to remember your chosen name, but he said sometimes it just feels like a lot of extra effort:

> It's a lot of just like reminding people, making sure people see it, correcting people when necessary, and trying to like be a little proactive about it which is unfortunate, and it's annoying sometimes because it's like, I don't want to have to like come into class and think: Do I have my supplies? What's going to be on the

> syllabus? How are we curving this class? and like the variety of things that you think about when you're going to college, it's like this is an extra thing, and a pretty emotionally charged thing to be thinking about anyways.

He feels like it is laziness when staff and faculty do not remember his chosen name. He said, "It speaks to how much you value a person if you're going to be lazy about a name." He has observed that names are used to show respect towards faculty and administrators, but that it does not go both ways. He gave the example that some faculty members expect students to call them doctor but do not respect the chosen names of students:

> I have a chosen name because I have a name that is inherently feminine, does not align with with my gender, and could potentially be a flag for other people, or has ties with me in the past to like feminine identity and I don't like it, it doesn't fit me, and it could be triggering. And my professors, people who advise me, people who are my boss, they mess up, and when I look back and I see all these other people and like everything else seems so seamless and I'm like, why isn't the same for me because this seems much more prominent much more urgent than you know, making sure you call doctor whatever doctor.

Nick does feel like the policy has helped him in instances with staff and faculty who used his dead name. He is glad that there is a policy he can point to.

> Being at least affirmed in the fact that there is policy there and that it's not just something like socially that I'm trying to coerce people into. I can point to the policy and be like, listen, like, I know maybe you don't personally agree with it but like this is GLSU's policy and I'm allowed to have this name and use this name and you are supposed to use this name because of the policy, you know, and

even just having it on like the absolute minimum of resources that they have it on. Those minimum resources that are prominent for Nick are his ID, Blackboard, and the scanner at the LGBTQ+ Center.

Nick believes there are a lot of gaps in the policy and resources that should be connected to his chosen name. He works on campus and has a very good understanding of how the data systems communicate with one another. For this reason he does not understand why CampusConnect and email cannot also be updated for students. He remarked, "I feel like all the excuses I've heard in regard to all the systems is something so inherently mundane." He understands it could be a lot of work upfront to update all the systems, but he feels it should be pretty seamless after it is initially done, and the technology updates would really help students take advantage of resources especially those connected to his GLSU email:

> That's a big, big important thing because you have to use your academic email to like get student discounts online for a lot of things... like student prime. A lot of things...you need to use your student associated email to like register for certain textbooks and things. A lot of professors, especially when I first started out, they're like: "Just use your email so you don't go to my spam folder because I'm not going to dig through there to get your email." And also just like when you're emailing or using your email which was given to you by the university to be able to access a whole bunch of resources and also it's like you know, professional it's the most professional email you're going to have for a little bit, and it's tied to your dead name. That alone will probably be a huge game changer, and is like the smallest but most impactful thing potentially that they could do is literally just fix

the emails.

Nick understands why certain systems that contain legal information need to be tied to a previous name, but he notes that there are offices on campus such as Counseling and the Cashier's office that have found ways around this. He thinks it could potentially be dangerous to still have these names pop up for staff and faculty in CampusConnect and then have them see a different name in Blackboard. He believes the university is outing all of the these students who do not have a legal name change in the system:

> That is dangerous. In my personal opinion, because it's not like GLSU is inherently or intrinsically a severely unsafe space, but existing as a transgender individual is inherently unsafe. And even though I doubt any faculty or staff will like use that information to like harm someone, physically, or like detrimentally out a student, it's also something that the student is going to have to interact with in class. If the professor dead names them in class the whole class could potentially know. And it's also like really awkward if you are in the middle of transition...maybe you don't pass very well, and it's that like one extra clue that your professor could potentially give your classmates.

Nick has heard a lot of excuses made by the university as to why the systems cannot be updated, and he does not think the administration understands how this weighs on students' minds. Because of this, he wants to fight for his fellow students, but he does not think the job should fall on the shoulders of the students to make these changes:

> It is something emotionally fulfilling to me to like perform activism, but that's also something that like...I don't want to have to fight against my own academic system to try to like treat people with human decency. It feels like the treatment of

> the policy kind of reflects on this stance in regards to like affirming diverse students because between the behavior that GLSU has illustrated thus far in regards to queer issues and diversity issues on campus, and a slew of other things it just seems like just they're brushing it off consistently over and over again.

Nick believes the university feels they have done enough just by creating the policy for students, and he does not think they understand how a lack of improvement makes students feel.

> I'm sorry that maybe this is like an additional thing that they're going to have to do, but it's also like their job. And honestly, having a policy that's kind of half baked isn't super affirming either. Like it feels like kind of just like a little treat to like kind of distract you from the issues at large, like: "Oh, here you go... Here's some gender neutral housing for you. Here's a little preferred name policy to keep you quiet and like satisfied until like, you know, a big uproar happens again."

Nick thinks that on top of the microaggressions that happen across campus every day, an incomplete policy creates a tough environment for students to learn. This became even clearer when students had to learn remotely during the spring 2020 semester because of COVID-19. He said the policy did not help with learning because he constantly had to change his name on Zoom. The name that showed up initially was being brought in from other platforms, and it became a hurdle with the virtual interactions. He also does not think professors handled chosen names very well during remote learning:

> If remote learning continues, I fear it will detach professors from students and potentially cause more issues with deadnaming and misgendering. There's been

proof that people may behave with less regard for others online because of some anonymity, delay of reaction, and ability to compose responses at their leisure.

Nick does not know if what he is relaying to me will matter because he said he's already heard too many excuses about why the policy cannot be expanded. He feels this lines up with the way he is treated on campus. I asked him if he thought he mattered to GLSU administrators and he responded by saying, "I still feel alienated and dehumanized by faculty and staff who seem to not be Safe Space trained, or even aware of LGBTQ+ identities, and how to treat gender-nonconforming individuals with decency." I followed this up by asking him what advice he would give to incoming trans students at GLSU. He said he would push them to take advantage of all the resources that are in place, and to legally change their names so they do not have to use this policy. He said it is unfortunate, but the university treats trans students better who pass and have made legal changes:

> That goes to show that GLSU's campus culture puts pressure on trans individuals to perform their identity a certain way and medically transition to be treated with respect by faculty, staff, and fellow students. If the administration and other departments raised awareness about trans and LGBTQ+ identities and issues, we might have a safer and more inclusive campus.

Parker: "It's so taxing and it's easier not to do it than to ever seek out anything that might help me better myself a little bit."

I have not worked with Parker in any formal capacity on campus, but he has sought me out for support. When he had issues with an administrator on campus misgendering him, he asked me to advocate for him. We are connected through social

media where he initially found out about my research. He was eager to help me with my research on the policy because he felt that improving the policy would improve the overall campus experience for students.

Parker saw a need to help out with my research just as he saw that same need at GLSU. One of the reasons he chose GLSU over other schools was because of an incident that happened the year before he matriculated to GLSU when transphobic posters were found around campus. He reflected, "I saw the poster incident that had happened. And I was like wow this university really needs people to push forward an LGBT+ initiative here. I want to be a part of making that change happen." He also chose GLSU because he wanted to move away from his family, and he liked that the school was almost three hours away from his hometown.

Parker has found a lot of support on the GLSU campus. He cited great experiences in the LGBTQ+ Center, The Women's Resource Center, Counseling Services, Residence Life, and his student employment position. He said that he has had mixed experiences with faculty on the campus. Before he began using the policy, he said he would let professors who he trusted know about his chosen name:

> It was definitely a big step for me and a big groundbreaking thing to like go and ask and be like, "Hey can you do this?" without like really having anything to like catch me if I fell there, but like I only told professors I knew who were going to respond probably well. Like if I had any kind of inkling a professor isn't gonna be cool I just didn't say anything.

Before the policy was put in place, if Parker felt like he was dealing with a hostile instructor he was not only quiet, but often absent from class. He remarked, "I like didn't

go to class for a few classes, if I knew the professor would like misuse names and gender." Parker used different strategies to reach faculty about his name before he began using the policy. He said he emailed them and introduced himself on the first day of class so the instructors could connect his face with his chosen name.

Before Parker began using the policy he also faced other challenges on campus. In regard to using Blackboard, he said, "I hated it. I absolutely hated it." This made online discussions and learning difficult for Parker. He also had a difficult time with campus resources, such as advising and tutoring. He said the issues were there before he used the policy, but they also still exist for him:

> I don't want to like have to deal with them dead naming me and being like: "Oh my god I'm sorry" and just like having like untrained people doing untrained behaviors that I am the one suffering from so like it's really hindered me from a lot of resources on campus completely, or it's turned me off to them for like multiple reasons. Not only that but like a big part of it is I have to go and put this labor of being like: "This is who I am. Yes this is fine. Okay, yeah you misgendered me cool...whatever." It's just like this long drawn out thing and it's so taxing. It's easier not to do it than to ever seek out anything that might help me better myself a little bit.

Parker was so affected by the barriers he was facing on campus that he thought he might flunk out of school because he felt like everything was "pushing down" on him. His family was not handling his transition well, and he did not feel supported on the GLSU campus. He said he probably would have dropped out if it were not for the support from staff members in the Women's Resource Center and the CARE office on campus.

They helped him make a plan and got him connected with OIE to start using the preferred name policy. He reflected on his initial thoughts when he found out that a policy existed, "I was like 'Whoa...this is going to be a saving grace.' Like it definitely wasn't, but it gave me hope." [Parker imitated how excited he was when he found out about the policy].

Parker has noticed that his interactions with instructors have changed now that he is using the policy. Parker has essentially had faculty who acted three different ways. Some instructors are very sensitive and overbearing, and they apologize to the point where it feels laborious to have a conversation about it. Some instructors are great from the beginning and make the correction right away with no questions asked. Unfortunately, there are still instructors who do not follow the policy:

> There are some professors who like clearly just do not respect you, do not care about who you are. Like I had a professor last semester who left my dead name on the attendance sheet every single day. I would cross it out and write my name, and he like just didn't care to fix it. Like we had many conversations, but it was like one of those things where it wasn't worth pursuing because I knew nothing was gonna happen because he just didn't care.

Parker said these different interactions with faculty connected with how engaged he was in the classes. If an instructor would not address him by his name, then it was hard for him to be successful in that class:

> With the professor who like just blatantly like disrespected me and hated me like I

> definitely did not do as well in his class because I did not feel comfortable talking in his class to gain participation because like I just felt very awkward and weird and like he was judging me every time.

However, when instructors respected who he was he wanted to be more engaged even when he was struggling mentally. Parker had a better learning experience when he felt like he was safe and mattered to the instructor:

> The professor who's like really cool and chill and just like "Yeah that's your name," I really enjoy going to her class even on a really bad mental health day. If I can like make an effort to be at her class and show up and like I want to do the work and like I want to participate and I have really great discussions in her class, and anytime I raise my hand she's like: "Yeah Parker...like what's up?" I feel comfortable voicing what I have to say and getting my participation points and like doing everything I can for that class. Not that I'll get an A in her class or anything but like it just helps, and even the professor who was a little bit overbearing, I still feel good about going to her class because I feel like I am safe and welcome in that environment, whereas like I didn't with that other professor.

Parker notes there have been some positive changes with faculty, Blackboard, and checking in to events. He really enjoys checking into campus events and swiping his dining card, both of which bring up his chosen name on the screen. He said that has really helped with interactions with dining hall staff. While he likes some of the changes, Parker still has faced several challenges with the policy. He had an issue getting his new ID card and felt like he had to "jump through different hoops" to get the new card. He took umbrage with the fact that the university charges students to get their picture updated:

It was going to cost money to change the picture, which I think is kind of sketchy. You know personally because if somebody is like changing their name and gender identity, and they're going through HRT (hormone replacement therapy) like just give them a picture that's gonna validate them. It could definitely help them a lot because even though like you can probably tell, oh this is the same person like it does look a little bit different, and so that's its own beast though you know, and it personally doesn't make me feel dysphoric to look at that picture. Um, but like if I was another person who like had longer hair in their picture or like had like a necklace on or something else like it could definitely probably trigger some something, and like just if you don't have a lot of resources having to go and pay for a picture like that shouldn't be a thing like GLSU should do better about that because really it is the little things that are life and death for trans people, and this could trigger somebody and that might just be enough to put them over the edge.

Parker also believes other changes should be made to the policy--especially in residence life and to CampusConnect. He said his dead name still comes up when he scans into his dorm, and it makes it hard to get to know the people working at the front desk of the dorm. His biggest issue with the policy is on CampusConnect:

There's no reason on CampusConnect that like it can't say my name with like my legal name in parentheses or like my legal name just on the financial tab. No reason that it shouldn't have Parker on there. Like the only time like you really need my legal name is for legal documents, so you know, signing like: "Oh yeah I'm gonna pay GLSU back or whatever." Yeah put my legal name on there...cool,

but my preferred name should be everywhere on campus and people shouldn't have access to my legal name unless they're going into a legal agreement with me.

Like Nick, Parker also had issues during remote learning because of the COVID-19 virus. He said he was "routinely dead named and misgendered by faculty and his advisor." He said his advisor did this to him even after he corrected her. Parker said these interactions really made it hard for him to be successful during remote learning, and he believes it is not just his advisor and faculty who make him feel like he does not matter, "GLSU has plenty of staff who care and are awesome! But when you get to the top I feel I am just a diversity token and cash cow for this university." He said administrators have sought out his advice, which often makes him feel good until he realizes he is doing unpaid labor for the university. One example he gave was when he was approached for student worker suggestions:

> She reached out to me and was like: "Hey look, if you know anybody for the different like intern positions or student positions like let me know." So I was like, you know, this isn't my job I'm not being paid for this, you are, but like it definitely made me feel valid to know that like this individual recognizes me as like a queer leader on campus who would like know people.

I asked Parker what advice he would give to incoming trans students at GLSU. He offered up the following advice, "You have to be tough. Hold your ground. Educate people and don't anger quickly, or else you will always be angry. Make connections with people who will advocate and help you." Parker knows these are important steps because he has had to put in the work with staff and faculty at GLSU to persist up to this point.

Tanner: "I became more of an advocate for myself, but in doing that, that's just so much more like I don't want to say emotional labor, but like I'm constantly coming out and I am constantly correcting people. You know...it just blew. I kind of felt like a melting ice cream cone."

I have known Tanner for two years. We worked closely in QSU on campus, and I helped him with some advising matters even though I was not his assigned advisor. He has helped me out with some LGBTQ+ educational programming and has always volunteered when needed. Tanner has been at GLSU for four years and has seen some dramatic changes during that time. He was one of the students that pushed for the creation of a preferred name policy the year before it was implemented. Tanner wanted to do this research with me because he feels like queer people are often overlooked at GLSU.

In 2016, Tanner decided to go to GLSU because his girlfriend attended a nearby university. He started using his chosen name the following year even though there was not a preferred name policy in place yet. Because of the lack of policies in place for LGBTQ+ students, Tanner got involved with other students to push for a preferred name policy, gender neutral housing, and the LGBTQ+ Center. All of these policies and resources have since been created on the GLSU campus. Before the policy was implemented, Tanner felt like there was a real disconnect between students, staff, and faculty:

> I just remember it being like harder for people to kind of get what was going on. I feel like, you know, even beyond the preferred name policy, faculty and staff just like weren't aware that queer people existed. So I feel like once the policy was put

> in place people kind of had more of a professional understanding of why this is a thing and why it's important.

Tanner found that the creation of the policy gave him more confidence to reach out to instructors to let them know his name.

Before the policy he was nervous about pushing faculty to use his name. Even though he got support from peers, QSU and the LGBTQ+ Center on campus, he still felt alone at the beginning of the semester when he had to approach instructors. He said, "I felt very like isolated as a person because literally before class even starts I'm outing myself, because I have to come out." He contacted the instructors using the advice given to him by peers to email and introduce himself at the beginning of the semester. The reactions from instructors were not always positive and this created barriers for Tanner. He said, "Yeah, I would avoid any situation. I wouldn't go to class because I didn't want to hear it. I still don't go to class because I don't want to hear it." Tanner even stayed off of Blackboard until he absolutely had to log in at the end of the semester to finish assignments. He finally decided to move away from his dead name for good whether the university was going to support him or not:

> At one point I was like: "Okay, this is it period I'm done with this dead name." So once that happened, I became more of an advocate for myself. But in doing that, that's just so much more like, I don't want to say emotional labor, but like, I'm constantly coming out. I'm constantly correcting people, you know like, it just blew. So I kind of felt like a melting ice cream cone, where I just, you know, every time I would have to correct a professor or anything.

When Tanner found out the university implemented the name policy, he said he finally felt supported on campus:

> I felt like supported, I guess. Like I'm not gonna lie to you...this university is not very good at backing up their LGBT community, at all, and you know, whatever...their prerogative, but I would say, you know, just even feeling like that small little, like, here's a crumb, you know, it was nice. Um, I think it made us as a community feel very heard, and like maybe we could, you know fight for more things because that was like a small thing I know, at the same time we were like trying to get the center open and trying to get gender neutral bathrooms open and all that, it was all kind of a domino effect. So the support, you know, I think that the preferred name policy really like was the first thing that they were like: "Okay yes we can do this." And then we kind of started pushing for more so just feeling that little bit of support helped us feel, you know like we could do more. And like we were a valued section of this university. And obviously this is an initial feeling so I'm not saying that's carried on, but yeah, it felt good in the beginning.

Prior to the policy change, Tanner did not feel heard or supported by the university, and he and the other students who fought for this policy felt like their voices might finally matter. When he reflected back on whether or not he matters to the administrators at GLSU, he said: "I feel like my voice matters to administrators only when I am right in front of them. They will be attentive and listen while you are there, but once you leave, it's like the message went in one ear and out the other."

As far as using the preferred name policy, Tanner found the process to be a little messy. He did not feel like everyone was on the same page, and this became evident when he went to get his new ID card. He said the card office did not know how the process worked:

> The people didn't really know what was going on. So I'm pretty sure I remember them calling OIE. I'm requesting a service and like I don't want to make you feel bad but also this is a thing and I feel like, you know, a lot of the time the GLSU shuffle happens, and not everybody knows what's going on. And I feel like the preferred name policy was just kind of thrown out there. And then people just kind of found out about it as they went along.

Eventually Tanner was able to get his new ID card, but he thinks communication around that process was confusing. He said some students thought they had to pay to get a new ID and not a new picture so they did not get a new ID. He said he had to help a couple students figure out the process, "Because there was a lack of marketing and broadcasting about the policy we're taking that labor on, and a lot of these kids had no idea."

Tanner said he felt more comfortable and supported telling his instructors about his chosen name now that there was a formal policy in place:

> I definitely feel more comfortable telling my professors about it because a lot of them still use their CampusConnect stuff and I'm like, Blackboard is there and you know that this is a thing, or I don't even know if you know if this is a thing, but, you should know. I'm fine with advocating for myself. Now, I feel a lot better about it, which is probably, partially because I know I have people who will back me up if something were to happen. And, you know, obviously the preferred

> name policy is something I can point to...but you should also treat me like a human. You know, that'd be cool. So, yeah, and I feel less like...like I'm coming out again and again and again and more just like I'm able to point to a policy and say like: "Here!" Because now it's more like, Okay, if you're not doing this, then I can report you for breaking this policy. Rather than like having to say: "Please just I'm just a young trans person. Please treat me with respect." [Tanner put his hands together in a begging manner].

Being able to point to a policy has helped Tanner feel like he matters on the GLSU campus. Other instances where he felt like he mattered included when he got his student employment position, when he worked with the student government, and when he received services from the Counseling Center.

However, the gaps in the policy have definitely made him feel like he matters less on the campus. Because his name does not show up on the CampusConnect rosters, he has to continuously introduce himself:

> I always introduce myself as Tanner. Always. I like to talk to people face to face. I really hate email and online stuff because of that reason, and I feel like it's easier to ignore an email than it is to ignore someone in your face, so usually I make it a point to email my professors, but also go up to them before the first day of class because they all use CampusConnect.

He said he tries to give faculty the benefit of the doubt when he introduces himself. He is never quite sure what their reaction is going to be when he talks to them.

Tanner has had some mixed experiences with faculty at GLSU. He had a great experience with an instructor last year. He felt he could trust her, so he let her know about his chosen name:

> I told her I was trans because she was just really nice, and she was like: "You know...I've never experienced this before and I'm sorry if I mess up but like, if you're willing to help me learn, I'm willing to learn." And then she did and she was really nice about it. It was lovely. I like her a lot. I would definitely take more classes with her.

Unfortunately, Tanner had a negative experience with another instructor, and it greatly impacted his attendance:

> I went up and I was like: "Hey by the way this is me." She was like, kind of guffawed, and I was like: "Okay, I see you." I haven't been back to that class this semester. This semester, has been so actually bad about all of that, and misgendering, and everything that I haven't been to class in five weeks, because I don't want to go.

Tanner's attendance was so poor his last semester that he had to withdraw from all of his classes. He does not intend to return next semester because of the challenges he is facing with his gender on the GLSU campus, and the amount of labor he has to put in to working with instructors who do not respect him:

> I could continue to correct them, but then I have to keep coming out, or correcting, or educating every single day, and I'm sorry but if you can't understand the concept of someone like having a name then you do not need to be working in higher ed, period.

Tanner felt like it was just too much work and he felt like he was not being seen in his course by the instructor or the students. This led him to withdraw from his courses which is going to create some problems for him:

> I work at the university. I only take three classes. So if I withdraw, I have to quit my job, and like that's not the only reason that I'm not going to, but like, that's a big reason is just dysphoria overall...just...I can't do it. And like everyone in the class sees me that way. So that's like, you know, 100 people a day that see me, and they're like seeing me wrong.

Even though he withdrew from his courses, he still thinks it is important to work on the policy so other students can benefit from it. The first thing he would do is change the name of the policy. He does not have a preferred name, he has a name:

> Preferred makes it seem like it's a choice for them to call me that. Whereas if it was something like chosen name policy or name change policy or something like that that makes it seem less like an option. You know because preferred name...I just also feel like preferred is really kind of othering language, you know, because it's like well I prefer this and it's not like this is my name it makes my dead name seem like it's still an option.

Tanner also thinks the process needs to be laid out in plain terms for students, staff, and faculty so there is less confusion. He mentioned that it should also go on syllabi so everyone knows about it. Other changes he recommended were getting the systems on campus to line up with the policy. He hates seeing his name on CampusConnect:

> The ideal policy would be a universal thing. Period. On CampusConnect, on everything and everywhere on campus especially email. [Tanner slammed his

hands on the desk]. I understand, like money wise, you know, you have to have your legal name there, but like, I don't see why there can't just be another column on the spreadsheet because even at like the doctor's office once you go through their preferred name policy, it's just that, like if you get a bill, it's going to be in your legal name, but every other interaction you have is going to be just that. So like, I don't get why we can't do that here. Doesn't make sense to me.

Another change that Tanner would advocate for would be on the computers in the computer lab when students log in to display their chosen name. Each time a student logs in, their legal name pops up until the computer is ready to be used. Tanner said, "And I would have it be changed on computers because every time I go to login to the computers, my dead name is up for like three minutes, you know, just loading." Tanner hopes these changes can be made for incoming students. He said if he could offer advice to those students it would be to use the policy, but also to find support on campus because not everyone is going to be helpful. He concluded by saying, "Don't expect much from administration and professors because they are usually not as educated or willing to listen to LGBTQ+ topics."

Ricky: "I probably wouldn't be here anymore if I didn't have that opportunity to even like change my name on my ID to even feel like, you know, this is who I am."

I have worked with Ricky over the past two years. I have done some informal academic advising with him, and I have worked with him in connection with QSU at GLSU. We also follow one another on social media platforms. When I contacted Ricky about being a participant in this study he agreed and said, "I feel like it's very important

to who I am as a person. The policy has helped me, so I figure if more people know about it, more people are helped."

GLSU was the only school Ricky applied to. He matriculated in fall 2018 and started using the preferred name policy the following semester. Before he used the policy, he had a lot of trouble sitting in class hearing his dead name:

> So my first semester here I was like still transitioning basically, still trying to figure out who I was, and so it was honestly like a punch in the gut. Every time I heard my name for like the roster and class, it was just like: "Oh, this sucks," but then by the second semester when I still had no idea that the name policy was like a thing it was like even worse where every email I was being sent every time a professor talked to me, it was just dead name, dead name, dead name and it was very upsetting so then finally halfway through my second semester here I decided to use the policy.

He was also afraid to correct instructors because he felt like he was outing himself in front of the whole class each time he did it. When asked about that experience, he said, "I just outed myself and I hate this." He also struggled with campus resources, such as academic advising. He said he had several academic advisors, and he had to keep introducing himself, "I have to introduce myself like: 'Hey this isn't the name that was on there.' I am still the same person. It's very like this hurts. It hurts my heart."

Ricky was really excited when he found out about the preferred name policy. Here he describes the moment he found out:

> I had struggled my second semester so spring 2019, and I was like, I can't go to class like I feel very out of place because my dysphoria, and I was talking to a

> trans staff member at GLSU, and they were like: "Well, we can give you a lot of different options you know we do have a name change policy," and I was like: "You have a what?? I can change my name on my ID? What??" [Ricky re-enacted the excitement he felt when he found out there was a policy by jumping out of his seat]. Like I knew that some of my friends did have their name like their preferred names on their IDs, but I didn't know how to do that. I thought you had to like pay...I thought you had to like go through this whole thing which like you do have to go through something but it's not like confusing and as big of a deal as I thought it was.

Ricky quickly began using the preferred name policy once he found out it existed. The first thing he did was get a new ID card. He said, "I honestly love just seeing my preferred name on my ID." He did not have an issue getting his ID, and he found the process easy and affirming. He equated getting a new ID to getting a new driver's license. He said, "When I found out that you could change your ID I was like: 'This is great!' It's like changing your driver's license, but like, it's your school ID so it's like, you know, a step before the legal change step." The policy and new ID helped him feel safe. He held up his ID and said, "This is my name that's on my ID. I don't have to go through a bunch of crap just to be recognized and feel safe."

Another aspect of the policy that Ricky liked was hearing his name in class. He felt that happened a lot more with the policy in place. He said, "Yeah, it was just so nice. It was like a weight was lifted off my shoulders, okay, because like I said I think the worst thing is being called on in class." He also felt good about seeing his name show up in Blackboard for his online course:

> I had an online class last semester, and I actually liked it because my name was changed on there, and I wouldn't have taken an online class if my name wasn't changed. Honestly, most of my teachers don't use Blackboard because I'm a studio art major so we just sculpt and don't really use Blackboard. The teachers that do...like it's nice because they just, you know, the discussion board, you have your name there. Granted, nobody really knows who you are if you're in an online class you know but if someone were to be like: "Oh, you're in my online class I saw your name." It's like you saw the right name and that's really important to me.

Ricky really liked that he did not have to tell his instructors for his online classes his chosen names. He remarked, "Every time I did a discussion board it was just in there, and it's so nice to not have to stare awkwardly at my legal name that I hate so much."

Using the policy also makes him want to be more engaged in the actual classroom:

> If I didn't have that opportunity to change my name in the system I probably would be less likely to go into my classes. I would probably like not even...I don't want to say like I wouldn't be here, but I probably wouldn't be here anymore if I didn't have that opportunity to even like change my name on my ID to even feel like, you know, this is who I am. A lot of my teachers don't use the blackboard roster so like if I didn't have that like support where I could, like raise my hand and be like: "Oh no, this is my preferred name, not this name" I probably would just sit back and just be like: "Yeah that's me."

He was even more engaged with people outside of the classroom. He said, "I want more people to know that I use this name. Before I didn't even want to show the bus driver, and now I do and I don't care that he probably doesn't look."

While he likes that his name shows up in Blackboard, he does wish instructors would take the rosters from Blackboard when they use them for attendance:

> The teachers and the professors don't go off of the Blackboard roster which God they really should, and that's something that like really bothers me when they don't do that. But when they do, I don't have to tell them like: "Oh, hey like this is my preferred name this is my legal name. They're different." The policy helps so I don't have to like constantly be like: "Hey, you know, this is what it is," but there still are problems because I actually had to withdraw from a class that the professor just did not understand that, like, that was my name. And I kept emailing her, and I kept like using the right name, and I was just like I can't do this class, so if it was mandatory for professors to get their roster from Blackboard, but like, since that is an option where your name has changed because Blackboard is supposed to be used by all the teachers. If they could use the roster from there, it would eliminate so much stress for everybody, especially like trans individuals where, you know, changing your name is so important, but like no one thinks about it if they're not trans, so it's like: "Please help!" [Ricky caught himself raising his voice here from his emotions].

When I asked Ricky about the class he withdrew from, he discussed the experience in more depth:

> It was just every class. I'd go in and she would do the roster, and I wouldn't even say I was in the class. I wouldn't even say like: "I'm here in this class." I'd have to go up afterwards and say like: "This is not my name. Please stop saying my legal name." I know like several people in this class, and they don't know me by

my legal name, and I don't want them to know me by me legal name, and so I was just like I am not going to go because I don't want to have to keep saying, "This is not my name." There was a combination of reasons I withdrew, but that was the biggest one.

Since he began using the policy, Ricky has found more support on campus, and he has had some good interactions with faculty in his major:

> They use the right name. You know they're kind of iffy on pronouns, but they at least use the right name, and I know that for a lot of us if they at least use the right name then that's great. It gives you the confidence knowing that the policy change, like the name change is there. It gives you the confidence to be like: "yeah, this is my name."

Ricky also said he has felt supported at the LGBTQ+ Center and in the Counseling Center where they always ask for his chosen name. He said that gives him the confidence to want to go to counseling.

While aspects of the policy have helped him feel supported and safe, there are changes Ricky thinks should be made to the policy to help trans students have a better experience at GLSU. His first concern was that the policy was not marketed very well:

> I wish I knew about it when I first got here. You know it is hard to tell freshmen like everything, but having that outlet...like when I went into the dorms, maybe my RA would have told me about it, or like if it was on like a little packet of like, you know, "Welcome to GLSU we have this for all of our LGBTQ+ individuals." I didn't get any of that until I even went to the LGBTQ+ Center, and I didn't know that we had such a huge LGBTQ+ population.

Ricky remarked that he worked at orientations and tried to tell students, but he thinks there should be a more formal way to let students know the policy exists.

Another change Ricky would like to see made to the policy is that he thinks it should be applied to student email addresses:

> The fact that you can't change your name on Outlook that's probably every person's problem is that you can't change your name on Outlook, and then emailing a professor, and you're just like, when I have to tell a professor that my legal name has changed it's immediately outing myself and it's scary, because I don't know who they are before I go into class. There are so many unknowns that I'm like...I don't...I don't know if I'm safe or not.

In addition to email, Ricky would like the campus community to understand why the policy exists. He wishes the experiences he had at the Counseling Center could translate to all staff and faculty:

> I'm also really grateful that when you go to the crisis hours or like the counseling center like they like ask name pronouns, and they're like, Alright, even if your name isn't changed with the policy, they still ask and they're still great about it and I wish that everybody was like that on campus. I wish that a lot of the professors and a lot of people like knew that like yes there is a name policy change and this is the reason why we have it because you need to feel safe on campus.

He believes that if everyone valued the policy there would be better understanding, which can feel patronizing. He said, "It feels like they're saying this breadcrumb is for you cuz you're annoying, so we're going to give you this policy so you can stop annoying us."

When I reached out to Ricky for a follow up, he told me he had withdrawn from GLSU. He said there were a lot of reasons why he was not ready for college yet. Remote learning during COVID-19 was hard for him because he is not good with technology. He hopes he can return when he is older and more prepared. He offered the following advice to incoming trans students at GLSU:

> I would definitely tell them to use every resource they can that is offered because it's better than nothing. You know the name change is such a great policy it helped me tremendously. Being able to like go to the gender neutral bathrooms was so nice. I also think with all the social justice movements happening right now, people will be more conscientious, and I think that's something that's really going to help incoming freshmen. I hope the campus and policies keep improving so maybe down the road it will be better for me so I can come back.

The social justice movements Ricky discussed were the marches and protests held for Black Lives Matter during the months of May and June. He said he was pleased to see a connection between the LGBTQ+ community and the Black community in his city during the month of June.

Ana: "Anytime I don't have makeup on and someone still refers to me by my preferred pronouns, I get a little fuzzy inside"

I am Ana's academic advisor. We only met once regarding her academics when she was admitted to GLSU. I have sent her numerous emails to meet with her over the past two years, but the only time she has responded to me is when I put out a request for participants for my study. Ana transferred to GLSU after attending two previous schools. She went to a large four-year university, and then earned her Associates of Arts at a local

community college in fall 2018. She chose GLSU in spring 2019 because it offered the major she wanted. She decided to be a participant in this research study because she wants to try and help the world understand the struggles that trans people face on a daily basis. She remarked, "I would not wish some of the stuff that I've gone through on my worst enemy."

Ana began using her chosen name in the spring of 2015, but due to her family rejecting her identity, she went back to her legal name until the fall of 2017. At that point she decided she could no longer live her life that way because she wanted to be seen for who she really was, "I identify as a woman. That's who I am." She did not start using the preferred name policy at GLSU until fall 2019.

Before using the preferred name policy Ana would reach out to all of her instructors to let them know she used a different name than what showed up on their rosters. She said all of her faculty were supportive of her using Ana. She quipped about one professor who simply responded to her email with, "Ana, Have you completed your first essay yet?" She felt validated by the fact that he made the conversation feel seamless. All of her instructors also gave her the opportunity to introduce herself to the class, but she only felt like that was necessary in one course where there was a lot of interaction with other students. Ana chose GLSU because of her major and she felt like the faculty in that major were really supportive about her transition. Her professors even let her know that a preferred name policy existed after she let them know she chose to go by Ana.

Ana was happy when she found out that GLSU had a preferred name policy. She said, "I was really excited and really happy." While she was happy there was a policy in

place, she was a bit confused how to actually use the policy. She heard students just had to send an email, but she felt anxious about sending an email to someone she did not know. She actually put off using the policy for a semester because she was unsure about the email protocol. The following semester, she decided she could not wait any longer. She said, "Starting fall semester, a lot of things changed in my life, so I was like: 'Okay, it's time we're moving forward, and I'm going to be using my preferred name from now on. I'm going to send this email.'"

Ana found the email method to be easy, but she still wanted there to be a more formal process in place to make sure her request went through. She received a response to her email that told her the request went through and that she was able to get a new student ID card. She found the ID process problematic. While a new ID with the chosen name is free, if students want to get their picture updated on the ID, they have to pay $25. She describes why she took issue with that:

> If they're changing my name on my ID they're already using resources to reprint the ID, and if I'm changing my name under the preferred name system, that is for people who are gender non conforming, and it makes sense that I would want to change my picture to reflect that. Like I have like a five o'clock shadow that literally never goes away no matter how hard I try, and it was in my original picture, and so when I got my ID changed like I had makeup on and everything and I wanted my ID to reflect that and I was just like: Why do I have to pay an extra $25 just to have that changed. Like if they want to charge people money, so they don't just like constantly go into change their ID, that's fine, but like for people who are using the service to have their id reflect their identity a picture

should be included.

Ana did pay the $25 for the new picture on the ID card, but she does not think college students should be forced to pay that if the university is already printing a new card. She believes most people who use the policy do not want to look the way they did when they first started at GLSU.

Ana also took issue with other aspects of the policy. The policy did not apply to the school's interface, CampusConnect. Ana believes one of the problems with the policy not including CampusConnect is that it makes attendance at the beginning of the semester difficult. She explained:

> The problem is most professors take their roster from CampusConnect, and it had my birth name, so in the fall my practice would be like, they'd call out my birth name, and I'd be like I go by Ana, so then when spring came around, I went to all my professors and was like: "Hey, I don't know where you got your roster from but just so you know I go by Ana."

Blackboard does include the chosen name, and Ana was happy the first time she logged into Blackboard to see her name, "It definitely made me happy, like I looked at Blackboard and I smiled." [Ana held her hands up and smiled].

Even though there were positive aspects of the policy such as getting a new ID and her name showing up on Blackboard, Ana has some recommendations about how the policy should be updated to make trans students feel safer on campus. She feels that there should be something that appears in CampusConnect to allow staff and faculty to know the student uses a chosen name. She said her doctor's office uses something like that, and it has made a huge difference for her. She also feels like chosen names should be the

default on CampusConnect for the student when it is not used for a legal reason, "People who don't deal with legal documents on campus don't need to know my legal name." She also finds it disheartening to log into CampusConnect and see her legal name, "Changing CampusConnect at least for the student so I don't have to log into CampusConnect and see my legal name and be like...UGH!" Ana's other big recommendation would be to change her name on her email. She said she is hesitant to reach out to instructors using her email because her legal name shows up, "It's just so weird that it shows up like that."

After Ana and I met for her first interview in March, I had to let her know she was not graduating when she thought she was. That was a tough conversation, but it was aided by the chair of her department. We were able to help her register for her last two courses. Unfortunately, Ana was not able to complete those courses. It is unknown at this time whether Ana will go back to GLSU to complete her last course. She is currently not registered for courses at the university. Once remote learning began due to COVID-19, she stopped answering my text messages, and she did not reach out to her instructors for help with the coursework until it was too late for her to pass her courses.

Cross Narrative Analysis

Each participant in this research had a unique story to tell, but across these five narratives themes emerged connecting the stories of all five participants. These themes highlight the common experiences of being a trans student and using the preferred name policy at GLSU. They reveal that while the stories are unique, there are some commonalities in how and where participants found support and barriers.

Across the narratives the participants described different forms of separation. For some that separation happened when they decided to go to GLSU and move away from

friends and family. In the case of Ana, it happened when she transferred to GLSU from another postsecondary institution, and again when she did not complete her coursework for graduation. For others it happened when they were already enrolled at GLSU, and they realized a name change was necessary for their identity development. For Ricky and Tanner, it happened again when they decided to withdraw from GLSU. For all the participants the separation indicated a need to move away from a previous identity.

Across the narratives the participants explained how they decided to use the policy. None of the participants used the policy when they initially arrived at GLSU. Tanner worked hard to help implement the policy. Parker and Ricky decided to use the policy because they were having trouble on campus, and they were looking for resources to help them persist. When Nick and Ana decided to use their chosen name they also decided to start using the preferred name policy on campus. For them, the name policy helped with the transition to their chosen name. While all of the students discussed how information on the policy was initially confusing or not disseminated well to students, they all said they were excited when they found out there was a policy in place that they could use. Tanner even believed the policy would help staff and faculty understand why chosen names are so important for students.

Across the narratives the participants talked about labor. Through their stories we see both labor that is fulfilling and labor that is emotionally draining. The participants all agreed to do this research study because they wanted to help other trans students. They considered this fulfilling labor. This type of labor helped the students persist. Other examples of fulfilling labor included helping fellow students and reading internet message boards about tips and tricks. Examples of emotionally draining labor would

include constantly having to reintroduce themselves to staff and faculty, negotiating between which resources felt safe to use on campus, working on behalf of administrators, and educating staff and faculty on campus about trans issues. For some students this labor became too much. Ricky and Tanner both discussed the labor they had to put in with faculty before they both withdrew from the university. Parker and Nick talked about ongoing negotiations with staff and faculty when they were misgendered.

Across the narratives the participants described support they found on the GLSU campus. All five participants initially saw the preferred name policy as a supportive tool for their persistence on the GLSU campus. The students also mentioned faculty who were willing to learn and listen to them. Parker said that even when he was having a bad day he would still attend the courses led by supportive faculty members. Ana joked about a response from an instructor that made her day when her instructor used her correct name to ask about a late assignment. Most students would not find this type of response from an instructor supportive, but for these students, seeing their chosen names was affirming – even when it was part of a casual conversation. All of the participants also talked about student services that generated a sense of belonging and mattering. The participants discussed the Counseling and LGBTQ+ centers on campus as places that made sure to use their correct names when they signed into those spaces.

Across these narratives the participants explained how the policy supported them. Ricky, Nick, Ana, and Parker all talked about how excited they were to log in to Blackboard and see their names appear. Ricky said he even decided to stick with an online learning course because Blackboard was updated with his name. Parker and Tanner discussed how it was easier to use the dining hall now that their chosen name

showed up when they swiped their ID card. Parker and Ricky said they were more likely to attend events on campus because when they swiped into the events other students would see their chosen names. Nick and Ricky talked about how meaningful it was to get on the bus with their new ID cards, and both made sure to always show the bus drivers; whereas they had previously hidden their ID cards when they got on the bus.

Across the narratives the participants described challenges on campus. Each participant discussed challenges they faced from faculty, staff, and the policy itself. Students felt challenged when faculty refused to use their chosen names. Ricky talked about not raising his hand during attendance or talking during a class because the instructor would not use his name. Parker said his academic advisor would continuously use his dead name when he met with her so he stopped meeting with her to discuss academic concerns. All of the students also mentioned feeling disheartened with having to purchase a new picture for their new ID card. Only one of the five participants from this study was able to afford the $25 updated picture on the ID card.

Across the narratives the participants talked about changes that should be made to the policy. All the participants mentioned changes that should be made to CampusConnect. They all want their chosen name to appear in this system. They understand it cannot appear for legal documents, such as financial aid and employment, and they are all fine with their legal name remaining for these purposes. The participants felt strongly about having the $25 fee waived for new ID card pictures. Parker said that without a new photo, the experience could be triggering for students who no longer present the way they did when they first started at GLSU. All of the participants want their email addresses to be updated. Nick said that if the university wants to encourage

students to use these GLSU email addresses more often, then the policy should allow for use of correct names on the addresses.

Summary

The restoried narratives presented in this chapter describe the experiences the five participants had not just with the preferred name policy, but with the GLSU campus overall. The themes presented after the narratives exemplify the connections the stories have to one another and highlight shared experiences across the participant narratives of their experiences on the GLSU campus. These themes encompassed academic identity, gender identity, recommendations and advice, labor on campus, the role of staff and faculty, separation, and policy logistics. These themes reveal that while the stories are unique, some key patterns exist the participants in how the participants navigated the GLSU campus.

CHAPTER V

THE PARADOX OF THE POLICY

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the findings that developed and the thematic categories that emerged in Chapter 4. Using Saldana's Codes to Theory method, four categories led to the themes found in these findings. Those four categories were campus navigation, policy logistics, identity, and persistence, and in this chapter they clustered in two interconnected pairs. Campus navigation and policy logistics addressed findings related to the study's interest in how the ability to formally use chosen names affects the ways in which trans students narrate and understand their experiences in both learning and social environments on campus. Identity and persistence contributed to the findings connected to the research focus on what ways (if any) a formalized institutional preferred name change policy contributes to identity development and persistence within the context of engagement, sense of belonging, mattering, and validation for trans students using a chosen name on campus. There is some overlap with these categories and findings because the participants' identity is salient in this research and guided their

navigation and persistence. Table 5.1 outlines the broad thematic categories and the specific findings providing evidence for these categories. The rest of this chapter explores the findings in this table in greater depth.

Table 5.1 Findings

Campus Navigation and Policy Logistics
Finding 1: Before using the policy students struggled with campus navigation **Finding 2:** Policy logistics felt different for each student **Finding 3**: Student type did not impact student experience **Finding 4:** A new ID card was viewed as social capital on campus **Finding 5:** The policy could be viewed as beneficial **Finding 6:** The students found that activism and labor are the primary ways to navigate campus and the policy **Finding 7:** The students believe the policy can be effective if it is more comprehensive

Identity and Persistence
Finding 1: The participants felt both validated and marginalized by the policy **Finding 2:** Faculty are key to helping students engage **Finding 3:** The policy alone cannot help students persist at GLSU

Policy Influence on Campus Navigation, Learning, and Social Environment

The participants discussed several ways the policy helped and hindered them on campus. Each participant discussed an academic trajectory that included their time on campus before they used the policy, how learning about the policy changed their experiences on campus, and how the policy could be improved to help incoming students. These experiences captured in this narrative analysis allow us to see how the policy impacted their interactions at GLSU, affecting how trans students narrate and understand their experiences in both learning and social environments on campus.

Student experiences on campus before the policy. Each participant spent time at GLSU before using the preferred name policy. For some students that was because

they did not know the policy existed, and for other students it was because the policy did not exist yet. Tanner helped fight to get the policy enacted at the university. He found that before the policy was implemented it was hard for students like himself to approach faculty to discuss his name without having formal support in place. This made him feel isolated and alone before he started using the policy. Tanner believed the implementation of the policy pushed the faculty to care more, and it made the trans community "feel very heard" on campus.

Other students did not know the policy existed, and they had a hard time navigating campus before using the policy. Parker said he hated logging into online courses and seeing his dead name show up in Blackboard. He also had issues with instructors in class using his dead name, so he began skipping class instead of dealing with instructors. Ricky also had some hesitation surrounding his campus experience before using the policy. He said he did not like going to class because he felt out of place, and always felt like he had to out himself to faculty and classmates. Both Parker and Ricky felt like they had run out of options for help at GLSU when they found out about the policy from staff on campus. They both remarked that realizing a policy existed was a major boost. Parker initially saw it as a "saving grace." Ricky said he would not have stayed at GLSU as long as he did if he had not found out about the policy because he was having such a hard time on campus.

Ana learned about the policy from faculty. She was a transfer student, and she emailed the faculty about trying out her chosen name. When she did this, the faculty in her department responded by letting her know there was a formalized process in place if she wanted to use it. She said she thought about it, and the timing worked out well

because it aligned with when she decided she wanted to use the name Ana permanently on campus. She said that even though she felt support from faculty, she was excited to find out there was a policy in place. She remarked that she was "really excited and really happy" when she found out. Like Ana, Nick also waited to use his chosen name until he was formally using the policy. He said before using his chosen name on campus he did not feel authentic or safe. He felt like he could not be his true self, and that made it hard for him to find support on campus. He said deciding to use his chosen name and the policy on campus made him feel a lot more comfortable. Both Ana and Nick used the policy as the impetus to fully using their chosen name on campus exemplifying how the policy was used to support their identity because it made them feel more comfortable with the change on campus.

Policy Logistics. Each participant in this study had different experiences when they began using the policy. For some students there were questions about how to actually go about using the policy. The students were told to send an email to the Office of Institutional Equity (OIE), but many of the students wondered aloud what that actually meant. Nick said, "Reading through the policy you're like: 'Oh wow, okay, what do I need to do?' And then they're like: 'Just email OIE.' 'Where's the email?' And then they were like: 'Just email.' And it's like: 'What do I email, like, what is the format of the email that I need to send?' Ana also had similar feelings. She did not understand if the email to OIE was the actual process or if it began the process. She said her former school had a form that made it feel more official, and she felt that would have made more sense when she sent the email.

Tanner felt like the policy was just thrown out there for students to use without a formal implementation process, which he thought made things "messy" for everyone. He said the process for getting a new ID card was confusing because he was not sure who to contact. He said it felt like he was getting shuffled around because the card office had to call OIE even though he was told the information should be at the card office. Nick also had an issue with the ID card office. He was turned away from getting his chosen name on his ID card because only the change in his middle name was sent to the card office instead of the change to his first and middle name. He said he decided to wait there for the confusion to be cleared up between offices because it was important to get a new ID card. Ricky was the only participant who remarked about how easy the ID card process was to use.

Type of Student. Whether a student was traditional or nontraditional did not seem to impact the experience of the participants on campus with the preferred name policy. Only one student was nontraditional and that was Ana. Ana's experiences on campus did not differ that distinctly from the other participants. She had more in common with the older traditional students like Nick and Tanner than she did with Parker and Ricky, but that was largely due to the three of them having more years of experience navigating a campus environment. Similarly, Ana, Nick, and Tanner had greater knowledge when it came to advocating for themselves compared to Ricky and Parker who were both ready to drop out of school before they were notified that a preferred name policy existed. One thing to note here is that the two students who were still active at the end of this study, Nick and Parker, could probably be considered the most

traditional because they moved from their hometowns to attend GLSU; whereas Tanner, Ricky, and Ana all lived near GLSU before they matriculated to the school.

The ID was an important campus resource. All the participants remarked about how important it was to get a new ID card. One of the advantages of the name change policy is that students who use it are able to get new ID cards with their chosen names for free. If they want a new photo they have to pay $25 to have the photo updated on their new ID card. According to Ricky, the ID card was important because it was the next best thing to having a legal name change. He said, "When I found out that you could change your ID I was like: 'This is great!' It's like changing your driver's license, but like, it's your school ID so it's like, you know, a step before the legal change step." To illustrate how important this change was to him, Ricky said seeing his name on his school ID made him feel affirmed. He said he looked forward to flashing it to the campus bus driver, and the card made him feel like he belonged. Nick also said he liked flashing his new ID card to the campus bus drivers because he felt like it validated his identity. When asked about having his name on his school ID he said, "I don't drive or have a license so having my preferred name on there is pretty affirming because I'm not like flashing the drivers my dead name non-stop when I'm pulling it out."

It meant a lot to the students that the ID was connected to different areas on campus where their chosen name would now show up. Parker said he was more likely to attend events on campus because people would see his name show up when he swiped the ID card. Nick said he liked seeing his name show up at the LGBTQ+ Center on campus. He encouraged more people who used the center to use the policy because it felt so good to see his name come up. Tanner said he was more likely to use the dining hall

because the cashier used the wrong pronouns until he started swiping his card with his chosen name on it. As much freedom as the new ID card gave the students, when the name did not show up it felt startling. Parker used the example of the residence halls where his dead name would pop up when he swiped in even after he began using the policy. He said that made it hard to want to talk to the people working the front desk because they would also use his dead name in conversation.

The ID card was viewed as an important and affirming resource for navigating the campus. The participants noted that they flashed it to staff around campus and felt affirmed doing so. It is a tool these students used to navigate unsafe spaces. It gave them more confidence to enter these spaces. Because the ID card was so important, the participants took offense to the $25 fee to change the photo. Parker remarked that it could be triggering for trans students to use an old picture with the new name. Ana said it was important for her picture to reflect who she is, and she took issue with the fee attached to changing the picture. She believes the school should affirm the students' identity with a free picture. Ana was the only one of the participants I interviewed who could afford a new picture with her student ID card. The participants in this research had few resources, but they proudly used the ID card as a resource whenever they were able to do so.

The policy was beneficial for campus navigation. All the participants talked about aspects of the policy that helped them on campus. Both Nick and Ricky talked about how excited they were to use their new ID cards on public transportation. Ricky and Parker both talked about how they were more engaged in classes that used Blackboard because the policy updated their names in that system. Parker said he used to hate taking courses online because his dead name would show up. The policy had

reversed that and resulted in online instruction as an academic space where anticipatory management was largely reduced. Ricky said, "I had an online class last semester, and I actually liked it because my name was changed on there, and I wouldn't have taken an online class if my name wasn't changed." Ana said she was excited the first time she logged on to Blackboard and saw her name on her computer.

The students also liked having a policy that they could point to as university support. Tanner believed that implementing the policy helped staff and faculty understand how important the issue was to trans people on campus. He was glad there was finally something formal in place to help him navigate campus. He said, "The preferred name policy is something I can point to to be like you should also treat me like a human." The policy initially gave the participants a feeling of security on campus that may not have carried over as much as they had hoped, but they did see it as a step in the right direction.

Activism and labor. The five participants spent a lot of their time talking about the activism and labor in which they engaged to protect themselves and others on campus. For example, Parker chose GLSU because he saw a need for activists to help the LGBTQ+ population on campus the year before he was admitted. His narrative revealed that while he wanted to help other students, his labor on campus also included being called on by senior administrators with issues that arose on campus. He pointed to examples of when he needed to help a university administrator find student workers, and when he was expected to speak for all LGBTQ+ students at alumni events. He began to see how undervalued his labor was when he realized how much money the GLSU staff

around him were making while they counted on him. He felt like the university saw him as a "diversity token and cash cow."

Nick enjoyed being an activist, and he considered that role a large part of his identity however, he found it to be a lot more work when he had to take on his own university for basic rights. He said, "It is something emotionally fulfilling to me to like perform activism, but that's also something that like...I don't want to have to fight against my own academic system to try to like treat people with human decency." Tanner was also very active on campus and was one of the students pushing for LGBTQ+ resources such as the preferred name policy, gender neutral bathrooms, and the creation of the LGBTQ+ Center on campus. It was also a large part of who he was, but even he found it to be a lot of work. He narrated how his awareness of the presence of younger students in his class prompted him to take the initiative in correcting instructors, but that work became too much even for him and he cited it as one of the reasons he had to withdraw from GLSU.

All five participants agreed to do this study because they thought it was important to be activists for other students who may not have a voice on campus. Ana chose to be a participant because she wanted other people to understand the struggles that trans people face on a daily basis. Ricky chose to do this study because he thought it would help people like himself if the work he did could showcase a helpful policy on campus. He said he would not want anyone to attend GLSU and not know about the policy while struggling with their identity, which is what happened to him.

While all five participants took on roles of activists for other people on campus, they were also doing labor on their own behalf. Each participant talked about how they

had to reach out to instructors at the beginning of the semester regarding their names. Parker, Ricky, and Tanner even talked about how they had semester-long struggles with instructors who kept using their dead names. All three discussed constantly having to correct instructors to the point that they started missing class and eventually withdrew from courses. Tanner said once he started using his chosen name, he had a lot more emotional labor on campus because instructors were still using his dead name. The constant amount of labor made him feel like a "melting ice cream cone." There were also examples of when students would not speak up because they did not want to out themselves during attendance. The emotional labor and use of specific tactics reveal dimensions of anticipatory management in which the students engaged in their classroom experiences. This management is a way for trans people to try to avoid an awkward situation before it happens or to disappear when an awkward situation has occurred (Wentling, 2019)

All five participants had different anticipatory management strategies. Some of the strategies they learned from internet message boards, such as emailing instructors before the semester, and some of the strategies connected to how they related to people. Tanner and Parker both said they went to meet their instructors on the first day because they communicate better in person. They wanted the instructors to match their name with their face. Sometimes this strategy worked positively for them, and other times it did not work as well, but they said it always showed what type of instructor they had by the reaction of that individual. When they sensed a lack of openness on the part of the instructor that experience often then deepened the level of anticipatory management associated with that instructor.

While the students enjoyed being activists and felt validated through some labor, they believe the work they had to do on their own behalf was too much to take on. This activism and labor revealed how they navigated the GLSU campus both before and after the implementation of the preferred name policy. Some of the labor they viewed as fulfilling labor, such as volunteering for this research or teaching younger students about school policies that were important to them. However, while they found this labor valuable, they thought paid staff members should also be doing some of the work of training people on campus and promoting policies. This labor felt emotionally draining and it took a toll on several students. When this research concluded, six months after the first interviews, only two of the five participants were still enrolled at GLSU.

Isolation, separation, and even withdrawing from the university reflects a different form of labor for the students – a response to the weight of advocating for institutional support for trans students. Parker and Nick chose GLSU to move away from family and peers and start over in an environment where they thought they would feel safe transitioning. Tanner and Ricky withdrew from GLSU shortly after I interviewed them. While they made the decision on their own to stop attending school, both participants felt uncomfortable on the GLSU campus. They discussed times when they would avoid going to class or would not raise their hand for attendance because they did not feel faculty had proper safe space training. Finally, Ana stopped checking in for this research after the school closed in March 2020. She also stopped doing schoolwork, and she did not graduate on time. She is currently not enrolled at GLSU. Each time the students had to isolate, separate, or withdraw, it was additional labor they were taking on to remain safe and resilient.

The students want the policy to be more comprehensive. All the participants discussed several changes that should be made to the policy to not only strengthen it, but to improve the overall experience for trans students on the GLSU campus. The biggest concerns for the students were that their chosen name does not show up in CampusConnect and the university email system. Because their chosen name does not show up in CampusConnect this created a lot of problems for students when attendance was called at the beginning of the semester. The students believe faculty should be trained to take rosters from Blackboard or come up with a different way to take attendance at the beginning of the semester as an alternative to using the CampusConnect roster. Nick said he felt most comfortable when he saw instructors create their rosters with chosen names on spreadsheets. Parker said he had a great experience when he introduced himself to an instructor, and even though she used CampusConnect, she added his name on the bottom of the attendance sheet to remind herself. He said that made him more comfortable going to class.

There is a deep desire among the students to see changes made to CampusConnect. Ana and Tanner both said they would like it to look more like the system used at their doctor's offices. While their legal names show up in that system, their chosen names are also there for office staff and doctors to see and use. The students understand the legal ramifications of having their dead name or legal name connected to legal documents in CampusConnect, but they argued against use of their dead name across all other university systems. Ana remarked, "People who don't deal with legal documents on campus don't need to know my legal name." The students do believe their legal name should still be connected to financial aid and student employment, but they

have a hard time understanding why CampusConnect cannot be updated for non-legal purposes. Nick emphasized that students are not calling for a change to the whole system – they just want their name to be able to show up in academic and social settings on campus. Nick knows this could be a lot of work upfront, but he saw it as the job of the university to make this policy work for everyone, "I'm sorry that maybe this is like an additional thing that they're going to have to do, but it's also like their job." When the systems on campus do not allow students to be affirmed for who they are, they become hard to use.

For example, the university email system, Microsoft Outlook, was brought up as problematic by the participants. They believe their email name should change if they are using the preferred name policy. Nick mentioned that the university encourages students to use their emails because it is tied to textbook discounts and university promotions, but trans students are hesitant to use it because their dead name shows up. He also pointed out that a neighboring university allows their students to update their names when they use the preferred name policy there. Ricky said it is really hard to email a professor his chosen name when the email does not even show that chosen name. He said he has to out himself before he even meets the instructor, and it is "scary, because I don't know who they are before I go into class."

Other systems were also brought up as needing to be updated to accommodate the name change. Parker has trouble going to advising and tutoring because his name will not show up in the systems used by those offices. He said he constantly has to correct his academic advisor, and it makes him hesitant to go to advising. Parker also brought up that he would like to see the names appear in residence halls when students swipe in to enter

the buildings. Tanner believes his name should show up in all the computer systems across campus. He gave the example of when a student has to log in to computers on campus and their legal name appears in large letters on the screen for everyone to see if they walk by the computer.

Other recommendations for the policy included renaming the policy so it does not make it sound like the students just prefer the name, but that it *is* their name. Tanner said the policy name feels "othering," and makes it seem like it is optional. The participants would also like to see staff and faculty get trained on the importance of why the policy exists. They believe if this happened, instructors would be more inclined to use a different roster. Students also want to see the policy on syllabi across campus. They feel this will make the classrooms feel safer, and they also view it as a good way to market the policy. Given the narratives of support and marginalization, the suggestions the students offered up would not only help in their campus navigation, but improvements to the policy would also make the students feel like they matter to the university.

The participants viewed the policy as incomplete due to these shortcomings. Nick said having a policy that feels "half-baked" was not very affirming. He thinks it symbolizes that the university does not care about the students because they do not care enough to update the policy. Tanner and Ricky both saw the policy as a "breadcrumb" offering that it was just "thrown out there" to appease the trans community at GLSU. As a result of the concerns narrative by the participants, a second clustering of thematic categories was evident in the data. It is discussed in the next section.

Identity and Persistence

As described in Chapter 2, identity is the way students make sense of who they are while they are in college, and persistence is a student-centered measure used to analyze a student's success at an institution. These two terms are interconnected in this research. As the participants reflected on who they were, and how they were valued on the campus, they began to see how it impacted their persistence. When the participants did not feel validated in their identity, they were more likely to not engage in academic and social activities on campus. When they did feel validated, they were more likely to engage in these activities. A lack of engagement negatively affected their ability to persist. As mentioned in Chapter 2, institutions retain and students persist. For each obstacle to persistence the participants describe, there is also a failure in the ability to retain these students. Findings on identity and persistence below address the way the students viewed themselves and their persistence in regard to the preferred name policy and GLSU campus. These findings connect with the research focus on what ways (if any) a formalized institutional preferred name change policy contributes to identity development and persistence within the context of engagement, sense of belonging, mattering, and validation for trans students using a chosen name on campus.

Moments of connection and estrangement. The preferred name policy at GLSU brings up a lot of emotions for the participants in this study. At moments they are elated when they talk about being able to point to a policy that affirms who they are, but they are also disappointed with the gaps in the policy that make them feel vulnerable on the GLSU campus. Because of these different reactions, this policy affects how they view

themselves on the GLSU campus, and that impacts how they engage in campus activities.

The students found the policy helped them feel engaged with the campus community because it affirmed their identity. The key to this engagement was the new ID card. Ricky and Parker both said they were more likely to attend campus events because they saw their name when they swiped into the events. This streamlined interactions with the students who were working the front door of these events. Nick also discussed how the ID card gave him more self-efficacy in his interactions on campus. He said he would flash it to anyone who needed to see it compared to his use of his old ID card, during which he would keep his thumb over his name. All the participants highlighted the ID card in their stories because of the importance it played for them in validating their identity. Ricky even said seeing his name on his ID card was the next best thing to getting a legal name change.

Blackboard was also discussed as another area where students felt the policy helped them. Ana threw her arms up in joy when she talked about how excited she was the first time she logged into Blackboard and saw her name appear. Parker and Tanner both said they hated logging into Blackboard before they used the policy. As a result they would fall behind on coursework because they always waited until the last week of classes to login and turn in work. We can compare that to Ricky who said he was much more engaged on Blackboard after starting to use the policy. He even said he purposefully chose elective courses that were on-line so he could use the Blackboard format. Nick said Blackboard made it easier for him to reach out to his instructors because he could email them inside of Blackboard without using Outlook. Blackboard

validated the identity of the students, therefore it made it easier for them to engage academically at GLSU.

However, there were other times when this same policy made the students feel marginalized. Ricky felt like he was outing himself whenever he had to correct faculty who used the roster from CampusConnect instead of Blackboard. Ana was disheartened when she found out she would still have to pay to have the picture on her ID card updated to match her gender identity. Tanner found the name of the policy harmful. He feels that staff and faculty too often think of his name as preferred and not chosen, and it makes it seem like a casual change instead of a change that aligns with his gender identity. Parker felt awkward using his ID card to check into his dorm because his chosen name would not show up. Nick was reluctant to reach out to faculty via email even though the school encouraged him to use his email for textbook discounts and promotions. Each one of these five participants felt like they mattered when they were told there was a policy in place, and each one of them felt marginalized while using the policy.

Faculty played a large role in engagement. According to the participants, faculty are key to helping students feel like they matter on the GLSU campus. Faculty were seen as both support and as barriers to academic success. When the students felt affirmed in their identity they were more likely to participate in courses. Validation and affirmation from faculty impacted engagement for all the participants. Nick hopes that faculty will continue helping him as a resource, but he is hesitant to depend on them. Parker had both good and bad experiences with faculty, and this affected his attendance. He said when faculty used his chosen name he would still try to show up for their class even when he was having a bad day. If faculty did not make any effort or used his dead

name, he was much less likely to attend class. Tanner had faculty who may not have known how to initially act around him, but when they showed some effort to learn more about him, he felt better being in their class. He said he did have to drop courses because not all faculty were willing to support him. Ricky had a very similar experience as Tanner. He relied on the instructors to use the policy, and when they did not use it, he withdrew from his classes, and eventually withdrew from GLSU just like Tanner.

The policy alone cannot help students persist. Some components of the policy helped the students persist; however, the students pointed to other areas on campus that need to be improved if GLSU trans students are going to feel like they belong on campus. On top of the recommendations to the policy itself, the participants believe that staff and faculty should have required safe space training and training on the policy. Nick said there are too many times when he has felt "alienated and dehumanized" by people on campus who are not safe space trained. Nick, Tanner, Parker, and Ricky all gave examples of when instructors did not know how to react when they were told about the students' names. The participants felt this was because instructors may not know the policy exists; therefore, they do not understand why there is a need for the policy. Tanner specifically said that when the policy was implemented he was excited because he could point to it when faculty used his dead name. He said it is harder to point to something if it has not been introduced to the people on campus who need to use it. For these reasons, the participants believe everyone at the university should be trained on the policy, both why it exists and how to use it.

While the findings indicate that training will help increase awareness, the participants still feel the university has a long way to go to make trans students at GLSU

feel like they matter. I asked all the participants directly in the second set of interview questions if they felt like they mattered to administration at GLSU. Within the student narratives, mattering seemed compromised due to the policy's weak foundation and the thin relational ties between the students and those responsible for policy implementation. Tanner only felt like he mattered when he was standing right in front of administration talking to them. He believes trans students are out of sight and out of mind to administrators. Parker only felt like he mattered when senior administrators wanted his unpaid help with projects. Nick said he felt like those at the top are starting to listen to LGBTQ+ needs, and that can be exemplified by the creation of the LGBTQ+ Center. However, he still feels like there is an overall lack of decency when it comes to trans students on campus. Ricky said he wished the administration at GLSU was more conscientious about the needs of trans students.

Summary

This chapter presented findings organized within two broad thematic categories related to the two research questions guiding this study. The findings in this chapter revealed that the policy influenced campus navigation and its impact was beneficial to a degree. This led to increased sense of an affirmed social identity that encouraged persistence for the participants. The policy helped the students feel like they mattered on campus. However, the policy still felt incomplete in many ways that made the students feel marginalized as they tried to navigate the GLSU campus. These two concepts are normally considered polar or opposite ideas. The participants in this study narrated that both feeling like they mattered and feeling marginalized happened with regularity and ultimately contributed to the paradox of the policy.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this narrative study was to explore the lived experiences of five trans college students using a preferred name policy at an urban university. The following research questions guided this narrative study:

1. At a university that recently implemented a preferred name change policy, how does the ability to formally use chosen names affect how trans students narrate and understand their experiences in both learning and social environments on campus?
2. In what ways (if any) does a formalized institutional preferred name change policy contribute to identity development and persistence within the context of engagement, sense of belonging, mattering, and validation for trans students using a chosen name on campus?

In this chapter, I interpret the findings from Chapter 5 as they relate to the above research questions that shaped the study, connect those findings to pertinent literature and

conceptual frames introduced in Chapter Two, and discuss recommendations for the preferred name policy at GLSU. Finally, I examine the limitations and strengths of the study and explore future research implications.

Within the literature on trans college students, there is currently no research that focuses solely on the experiences on trans college students and preferred name policies. Most policy studies are focused on more than one policy while looking at students at more than one school (Goldberg et al., 2018; Nicolazzo & Marine, 2015; Pitcher et al., 2018). This narrative analysis fills in the gap on trans college student literature by focusing on a preferred name policy at an urban university with five trans college students. The way these students experienced this policy, and the way they defined their identity based on these experiences is explored in the following discussion.

Research Question One: Lived Experiences

The five participants shared stories that exemplified ways the policy shaped their experiences on the GLSU campus. The first research question explored lived experiences, and it focused on the first two stages in Tinto's student departure theory: separation and transition. Tinto's third stage, incorporation, will be addressed in the research question two discussion. In terms of separation and transition, the participants' stories aligned with previous research on student departure by detailing how the participants separated from their past lives and transitioned to a new life stage using a preferred name policy meant to affirm their identity. Tinto's (1975, 1993) theory on student departure highlights the difficulties students face over time while trying to persist in college. In this model the separation stage requires students to disassociate themselves from previous communities, such as residences or high school culture. The second stage represents the transition to

college stage, the passage between old and new. Here, Tinto describes the students who are experiencing a sense of loss; they are no longer strongly bonded to the past, but not yet tied to the future.

According to Tinto, in the first and second stages, the student's response to the separation and transition determines if they will persist in college. In this research the separation stage is marked as the period before the students use the preferred name policy on the campus. The transition stage is marked by the students deciding to use a preferred name change on campus. The passage from each stage is itself a transition for the students, which is why I have also incorporated Schlossberg's transition theory to describe what tools the students use to navigate these changes. In transition theory, these tools and resources are referred to as the Four S's: situation, self, support, and strategies (Goodman et al., 2006). As the participants talk about navigating the GLSU campus in their narratives they also discuss the Four S's as ways that helped them do this.

The participants lead us up to the transition stage in that the participants describe their experiences on the GLSU campus before they decided to use the preferred name policy. Both Nick and Parker chose to attend GLSU because it was far from home. They felt like this distance from peers and family would make it easier for them to transition while they were in college. Ana transferred to GLSU because she liked that the school offered her the major she was looking to pursue. Tanner followed his girlfriend to Cleveland, and Ricky chose GLSU because it was the only school he applied to when he was in high school.

Ricky and Parker both struggled at GLSU before learning about the policy. Both students talked about learning about the policy while they were contemplating

withdrawing from GLSU. Parker described the policy as "a saving grace" at the time. Tanner also said he struggled with faculty members before there was a policy he could point to as formal support. He said his campus interactions were a reason he began to push for a preferred name policy in 2016, a year before the policy was implemented. Both Nick and Ana still used their legal names up until they decided to use the policy. Their narratives reveal that the policy helped to validate their gender identity, and it made it easier for them to navigate the campus. Research shows that it is not unusual for trans students to struggle on campuses until they have more formal help from policies and institutional practices (Goldberg et al., 2018; Marine, 2017; Pitcher et al., 2018). The push to use these policies moves them out of the separation stage. This separation stage for the participants exemplified the ways they moved away from their previous lives, and how they interacted on campus without using a preferred name policy.

For Tinto, the second stage in his theory represents the transition stage where students are no longer strongly bonded to the past, but not yet tied to the future. In this research, the participants discussed what the decision was like to begin using the policy, which led them up to the transition stage. This second stage also included policy logistics, and how the students transitioned to using the policy on campus. Tanner, Parker, and Ricky knew right away they wanted to use the policy, but Nick and Ana took some time to think about using the policy. Coincidentally, it was Nick and Ana who also had the most questions about sending the email to the Office of Institutional Equity (OIE) on campus to begin using the policy. It appeared that the confusion about how to begin using the policy slowed down their ability to actually use it as both waited a semester before deciding to use the policy and their chosen name on campus.

The rest of the findings related to how trans students narrate and understand their experiences in both learning and social environments on campus connect to Schlossberg's Four S's of situation, self, support, and strategies (Goodman et al., 2006). In employing Schlossberg's theory analytically to this study, *situation* included student type and overall perception of the transition of using a preferred name policy at an urban university, *strategies* explored the ways students navigated the campus, *support* identified how the students felt supported by staff and faculty and overall campus climate, and an examination of *self* looked at identity of the student.

The participants in this research study were four traditional students and one nontraditional student. Studies on traditional students describe them as coming straight from high school, under the age of 24, dependent on legal guardians, and they often do not work outside of school (Bye et al., 2007; Macari et al., 2006). Studies conducted on nontraditional students show they lead different lives outside of college that may include full-time employment or dependents that impact their academic success compared to traditional students (Bye et al., 2007; Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; Kenner & Weinerman, 2011; Tilley, 2014). Ana was the only nontraditional student in this study, and she was also the only transfer student in this study. Before attending GLSU, she attended two other postsecondary institutions. Compared to the other traditional students in this study, she had less complaints about faculty, but she attributed this to the major she chose, and not to her status as a nontraditional student.

There were some other subtle differences in her story compared to the other four students. She was the only student who could afford a new picture on her ID card, and she was the closest student to graduation. Unfortunately, she failed her final course and is

no longer an active student at GLSU. Her inability to graduate from GLSU is not directly tied to being a nontraditional student, but that does not mean she did not face some of the same issues discussed in research on nontraditional students. Those issues as discussed by Bean and Metzger (1985) are related to external factors instead of institutional factors, such as difficulties at home and working full-time.

The ID card was so encompassing in this study that it represented all four of the S's: situation, self, support, and strategy. The ID cards were a way for the students to view the policy in a positive way, which aligned with situation in this study. According to Goodman et al. (2006) the situation in transition theory is how transitions are perceived. The ID card validated identity for the students because they were able to get their chosen names on the new cards. When Nick pulled his ID card out during the interview and smiled at it, he was revealing how important this change was for him. Ricky felt that the new ID card was the next best thing to a legal name change on a driver's license. He and Nick talked about how they liked to flash their ID cards to bus drivers. Parker and Tanner brought up how the new cards made using the dining hall easier because their names would come up when they swiped their ID cards, and they found that the cashier was less likely to misgender them. In this sense, the new cards could also be seen as support because the students felt safer when they flashed their new ID cards. Ricky summed this up well when he said, "This is my name that's on my ID. I don't have to go through a bunch of crap just to be recognized and feel safe." By flashing their ID card on campus, the students used this as a strategy to protect themselves and validate their identity. Even though most of the participants did not have the resources to get a new picture, they still found ways to be strategize with the new cards. According to Marine (2017), not all trans

college students have the resources to be resilient social agents; therefore persistence can be particularly challenging for this population of students.

The ID card was one of many strategies that the students employed to try to safely navigate the GLSU campus. Other strategies the students used were activism, labor, and resistance. The activism and labor the students did on the GLSU campus aligned with what previous scholars have revealed about trans student labor. A large amount of physical and emotional labor is invested in advance of possibly being misnamed and misgendered in public spaces (Ahmed, 2012; Goldberg et al., 2018, Pryor, 2015; Wentling, 2019). This labor is what Wentling (2019) refers to as anticipatory management, which is a way for trans students to anticipate an incident and either try to manage it in advance or hide their identity to avoid an incident before it occurs. This was exemplified when the participants would email faculty in advance of a first class to clarify their name on the roster. An example of avoidance would be when students did not raise their hand when attendance was taken in class. This aligns with the literature that discusses how and why trans students get nervous before class rosters are read aloud in classrooms (Pusch, 2005; Seelman, 2019).

Isolation and separation may not seem like labor strategies, but all five participants discussed the ways they isolated themselves to feel safer. Nick and Parker isolated themselves when they decided to choose a college that was far from their hometown. They felt it would be safer to transition away from family and high school peers. Nick said, "Part of the reason to come to GLSU was also somewhat influenced by just coming to a different city, different space where I knew none of my peers were going to be following me." Participants would also isolate themselves in class. Ricky talked

about just wanting to sit in the back of the classroom and not engage with anyone when he knew his dead name would be called for attendance. He said there were times he purposely did not raise his hand when his legal name was called. Parker and Tanner also talked about skipping class because they did not feel comfortable attending the courses. Only two of the participants are still active at GLSU because Tanner and Ricky withdrew, and Ana was unable to graduate on time. In the end, all three of these participants isolated themselves from the campus community. These examples of isolation were how the participants controlled their environment to feel safer. Nicolazzo (2017) would describe this type of labor as resilience in which the participants were trying to feel safe while also trying to live as authentically as possible.

Often the labor trans college students take on can be exhausting (Nicolazzo, 2017). In this research, the participants had to educate both staff and faculty regarding trans issues. Tanner took that on when an instructor was willing to learn about him, but he admitted it was still a lot of work that other students do not have to do with faculty. Often trans students get tokenized in these learning environments, and this creates more labor for those students (Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017). Parker talked about feeling this way when he said the university viewed him as "a diversity token." The labor the participants had to take on showed how resilient they were as they navigated the GLSU campus. When the students lived as authentically as possible while trying to serve as social change agents on the GLSU campus, they showed the same resilience that trans college students have shown in previous studies (Nicolazzo, 2017; Singh et a., 2012). This translated to the advice they would give to future trans students at GLSU. Nick, Parker, Tanner, and

Ricky all would tell future students to advocate for themselves and take advantage of as many resources as possible, so they can feel comfortable as themselves on campus.

Overall, the students found that the preferred name policy at GLSU was beneficial. Pitcher et al. (2018) found that students see policies for trans students as a positive symbolic gesture. The participants in this research felt better with a formal policy in place for their name change. Tanner said he liked that he could point to a policy when he received pushback from staff or faculty. All the participants were excited when they found out about the policy, and they felt that trans students were finally being heard on campus. Research has shown that when policies like this exist on college campuses, they are viewed favorably as a reflection of institutional values (Pitcher et al., 2018).

The policy in place at GLSU has been helpful for the participants, but they also feel there are large gaps in the policy when it comes to technology and marketing of the policy. As Nicolazzo and Marine (2015) found in their research, trans students are not one fixed type, and institutions need to be open to reassessment of policies that help these students. Goldberg et al. (2018) discovered that when there are gaps in policies for trans students, those students end up feeling vulnerable and are worried about being outed in the classroom. Tanner, Ricky, and Parker all brought up their fear of being outed because the preferred name policy does not show up in places that would have made them feel more safe, such as campus rosters and email addresses. The participants also felt that the policy could be promoted better. Often these participants had to be the ones to tell other students on campus about the policy. Issues with policy articulation have also been discussed in other studies when students were not aware that there were policies in place to help them navigate campus (Beemyn & Brauer, 2015; Goldberg & Kuvalanka, 2018).

The first research question addressed the experiences of the participants on the GLSU campus. It answered what the participants were doing before the policy and discussed issues and benefits of the policy. The question revealed how the students move from the separation stage to the transition stage using coping resources as described by Schlossberg (2011). The participants' lived experiences were full of labor and resilience that shaped who they were, and how they viewed themselves. As question two reveals, that work, in conjunction with the preferred name policy, was not always enough to keep the students enrolled at GLSU.

Research Question Two: Identity Development and Persistence

When this study began all five participants were full-time students at GLSU. When this study ended five months later only two students were still attending GLSU. Of those who left the university, one student was not able to graduate due to failing grades, and two students had withdrawn exemplifying the spectrum of persistence for these participants. This spectrum of persistence was marked by the ways the students felt like they mattered and belonged on the GLSU campus. These variables then impacted their ability to engage on campus due to different levels of validation. This research question focuses on the third stage in Tinto's framework: the incorporation stage. By exploring the constructs of engagement, sense of belonging, mattering, and validation, persistence is studied through the lens of identity, and how the students viewed themselves on the GLSU campus.

The third stage in Tinto's theory is called the incorporation stage. The incorporation stage requires that students feel a sense of belonging not only in the classroom, but in cocurricular activities as well. According to Tinto (1988), "Persistence

in college may arise either in the academic and/or in the social system of the institution and reflect both the personal and intellectual integration of incorporation of the individual into the communities of the college" (p. 448). In order to gauge if participants in this study were able to incorporate themselves, the constructs of sense of belonging, mattering, engagement, and validation were examined in regard to student identity and persistence.

The preferred name policy at GLSU made the participants feel like they mattered, but it also made them feel marginalized. According to Schlossberg (1989) marginality and mattering are polar themes that influence student engagement. Rendón (1994) found that one way to make students feel like they matter is to validate them both academically and interpersonally. This validation comes when students feel needed and appreciated to the campus community (Rendón-Linares & Munoz, 2011). The participants described the different ways they felt validated by the policy when they talked about seeing their names show up in Blackboard and when they got their new ID Cards. Ana raised her hands in joy when she talked about the first time she saw her name pop up on her computer. Nick and Ricky were excited to flash their ID cards to bus drivers because the ID card felt almost as validating as a driver's license. The participants felt like they mattered when these things happened to them. Schlossberg et al. (1989) found that when students feel like they matter, their motivation is improved and they are more likely to engage. This was exemplified when Parker said he attended more events on campus because his ID card was updated.

On the other hand, there were factors about the policy that did not make the participants feel validated. Nick, Ricky, and Tanner all described how the policy felt

rushed, which created issues for them on campus. Nick remarked, "And honestly, having a policy that's kind of half-baked isn't super affirming either. Like it feels like kind of just like a little treat to like kind of distract you from the issues at large." Ricky and Tanner also said the policy felt like a treat or a "breadcrumb" meant to keep trans students quiet. These students felt marginalized when they saw the gaps in the policy. They are describing what Ahmed (2012) refers to as a "ticked box" approach to higher education policies for marginalized students (p. 106). This approach means that a postsecondary institution has done enough to be in compliance with a policy, but it has not gone above and beyond to make the policy feel inclusive for all students. Like all the participants, Parker was initially excited to find out about the policy, but he was sure to note that it did not turn out the way he thought it would. Here is how he described looking back on the policy, "This is going to be a saving grace. Like it definitely wasn't, but it gave me hope." The preferred name policy was a paradox for the participants. In some areas, they felt validated, but in other areas they felt like they were disappointed the policy did not do enough to make them feel like they mattered more at GLSU.

When the participants discussed feeling safe and validated on campus, they always mentioned faculty interactions. The ways in which faculty did and did not support these students were key to campus engagement. Research has shown that when faculty respected a trans student's individuality, students felt more comfortable in the classroom (Duran & Nicolazzo, 2015; Seelman, 2019). Linley et al. (2016) found that faculty can provide both formal and informal support for trans students, and when they do this, they are able to help these students move from the margins. Wentling (2019) discussed ways that faculty can help students to understand formal policies when they may seem

confusing. Ana's faculty alerted her to the preferred name policy when she reached out to them. Without that push, she may not have found out about the policy in the first place.

Hoffman et al. (2003) pointed out that when faculty are compassionate toward students, those students have an increased sense of belonging on college campuses. All the participants in this study gave examples of when they felt comfortable in the classroom. Nick discussed how an instructor updated their attendance sheet, which made him feel validated in that class. Parker and Ricky both discussed how they would be more likely to attend class when instructors respected their names and pronouns. Tanner talked about how a faculty member wanted to learn how she could be a good ally to Tanner. Ana joked that a response from an instructor using her chosen name and asking about a late assignment made her day. Because of these reasons, the students felt more comfortable attending class and engaging in the coursework. They felt like they belonged.

While there were positive experiences with faculty, they were also negative experiences that left lasting impressions on the participants. Parker, Tanner, and Ricky all talked about negative interactions with faculty who would continuously dead name them. This in turn led to all three students skipping class, and then eventually withdrawing from GLSU in the case of Tanner and Ricky. BrckaLorenz et al. (2018) reported significant relationships between positive and negative interactions with faculty and campus engagement. The difference between a faculty member treating the students with respect was often the difference in the level of engagement for the participants in this study. Parker said that even when he was having bad mental health days he still tried to show up for instructors who treated him with respect, but would not go to the class of instructors

who misnamed him or misgendered him because that would make those days even worse. Garvey and Rankin (2015b) found that if trans students are unable to construct meaningful relationships with faculty and students, they would be less likely to engage and persist on campus. This is evident in the cases of Tanner, Ricky, and Ana.

The mixed nature of positive and negative interactions with faculty led the participants to talk about ways the GLSU campus needs to improve for trans students moving forward. While the participants found parts of the preferred name policy helpful, and they had some positive interactions with faculty, all five mentioned changes they wanted to see take place at GLSU. The participants feel the campus climate needs to improve to increase their sense of belonging and engagement on campus. Empirical evidence on college student engagement has consistently shown that when students are actively engaged on a college campus, they are more likely to persist through graduation, but "when campus climates are hostile and antagonistic toward certain students, disengagement, dropping out, and maladjustment are likely unintended outcomes" (Quaye & Harper, 2015, p. 7).

The participants would like to see mandatory safe space training that involves an explanation of the preferred name policy. The training would be a step forward in improving campus climate by removing campus harassment and microaggressions. Seelman (2019) found that trans students feel more comfortable when people in power take steps to educate themselves and others on college campuses. This training would be a strong signal to the students that they matter to the university. Nick, Ricky, Tanner, and Parker all expressed doubts that they mattered to campus administration when they were

their authentic selves. Schlossberg et al. (1989) found that focusing on student mattering created campuses where students were more motivated to learn, be engaged, and persist.

Dugan (2012) found that trans students experience a lower sense of belonging than cisgender students due to harassment on college campuses. Faculty and staff continuously using the dead name of a trans student is one example of this harassment. Other examples could include what the students perceived as microaggressions that may not always be intentional. When a student's dead name is used because it shows up when they swipe into the dorms like Parker described, this can be seen as a microaggression. These microaggressions also contribute to a negative campus climate, and they send a negative message to people of marginalized identities (Marine & Catalano, 2015). Garvey et al. (2018) found that when these microaggressions were removed, trans students had greater academic success and their persistence was significantly influenced at these institutions.

The findings from the second research question exemplify the ways interactions on the GLSU campus impacted both identity and persistence. This in turn impacted the students from reaching the incorporation stage. This stage is where students adopt norms that help them establish strong bonds in social and intellectual communities of college life. This adoption of norms by students is an archaic way to think of student development according to Abes et al. (2019). Abes et al. (2019) believe that student identity models need to put the onus on school administrators who should adopt new ways of thinking and acting. By acting differently, school administrators begin to understand oppressive barriers so those barriers can be removed for marginalized student (Abes et al., 2019). In this study, school administrators can take action to make the policy

more inclusive. By doing this, barriers will be removed for these students on the GLSU campus. This will in turn impact the way these students make meaning of themselves and the policy.

Baxter Magolda (2001, 2009) examined the ways students make meaning and create self-authorship. Self-authorship is defined as "an ability to construct knowledge in a contextual world, an ability to construct an internal identity separate from external influences, and an ability to engage in relationships without losing one's internal identity" (Baxter Magolda, 2001, p.12). Self-authorship was clear throughout this study as the participants described the ways they made meaning from the world around them as they described both positive and negative experiences on the GLSU campus. The participants were able to construct an internal identity separate from external influences, and they engaged in relationships without losing their internal identities through the ways they practiced labor and resilience on the campus including isolation and separation. While the participants worked hard to centralize their identities, they did so in spite of the marginalizing impact of the policy due to its weak support. In a related manner, Baxter Magolda (2003) believes inclusive practices and policies can only be created when the university makes the students identities central to learning as well.

The policy itself also became a way for students to make meaning. Vacarro et al. (2015) believe that one of the ways students make meaning is by contextual factors such as university policies and practices. In the model created by Vacarro et al. (2015) that centers minoritized identities of sexuality and gender (MIoSG), students navigate different systems as they develop their identity. The two systems that are salient in this current study are the microsystem and the exosystem. In the microsystem, the students

come in direct contact with others. For the participants in this study that would include staff, faculty, and other peers. These interactions shaped how the participants viewed themselves on campus. Policies and campus practices impact the student's identity in the exosystem of the model. These two systems shaped the student identity and engagement levels of the participants. When they felt like they mattered and belonged, they also felt safe to engage in activities. Whey they did not feel that way, they would isolate themselves for safety.

Overall, the preferred name policy at GLSU has been helpful for the participants, but the gaps in the policy and the lack of training on campus left the students feeling marginalized. This has contributed to a negative campus climate where the students had to take on labor to persist and be resilient on the campus. At times, this labor was not enough, and led participants to withdraw from the university. According to Tinto (1988), if students are unable to incorporate themselves into communities on college campuses, there is a strong chance they will not be successful and will eventually withdraw from college. Research has shown that when marginalized students do not feel a sense of belonging or validated, it is harder for them to persist (Quaye & Harper, 2015; Rendón, 1994; Strayhorn, 2019; Tillipaugh, 2019).

Overarching Findings

In order to better capture the overarching findings from the research questions that guided this study, I developed the model below in Figure 6.1. The figure reveals that the external coping factors found through support and strategies, and the internal questions as follows shape the identity and persistence of the student: Do I matter? Do I feel validated? Do I belong? Is it safe to engage on this campus? As the students move

through the first two stages of separation and transition, their sense of self and ability to persist are shaped by these internal questions and the external factors of support and strategies.

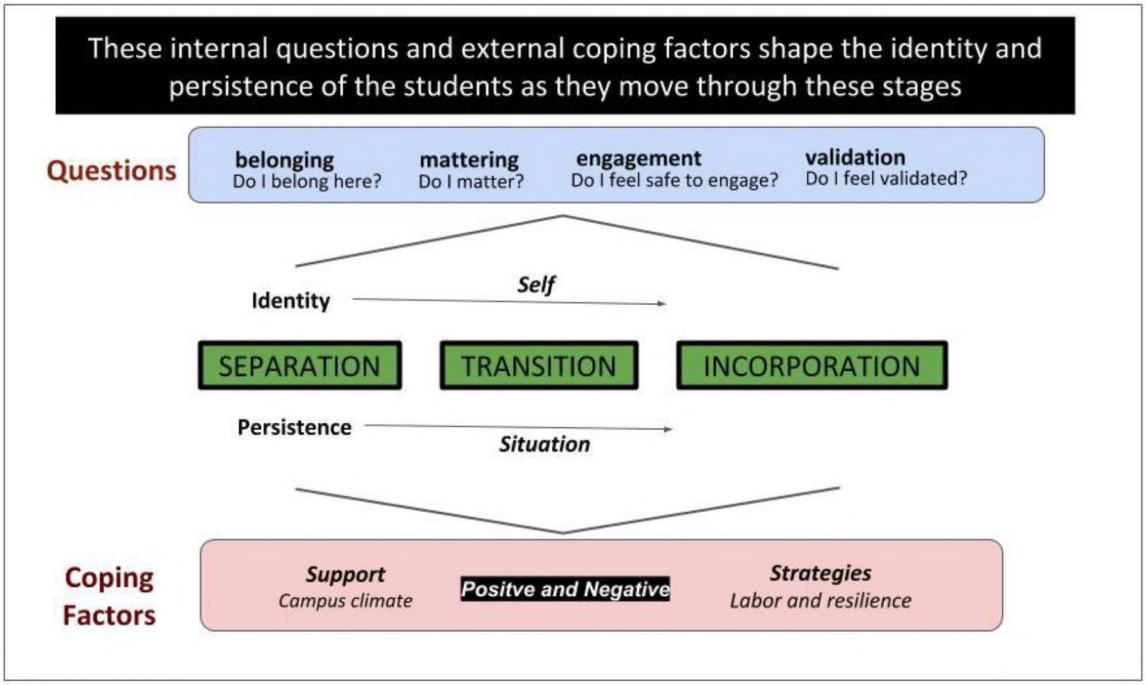
In this model, the external coping factors of support and strategies are viewed as both resources and deficits to the students. The campus climate for these students included interactions that occurred in the classroom, through email, through casual conversations in the residence and dining halls, on public transportation, and with administrators on the GLSU campus. These interactions could be positive when the participants were recognized by their chosen name or they could feel hostile when students did not feel welcome as their authentic selves. In order to maneuver through these interactions, students came up with strategies that often took an emotional toll on the them while they exercised resilience. While the labor could feel fulfilling and positive for the students, it often became too much for them. These factors shaped the way they saw themselves while also impacting their persistence at GLSU. In this model identity and persistence move along through the stages of separation and transition together until they get to the final stage of incorporation. It is here analytically in the narratives where the study literally loses three participants, and the two remaining participants continue to struggle with campus resources.

In this study the situation is represented by the students navigating the campus using the policy. This meant they had to navigate a campus climate that included both positive and negative interactions by using their own strategies to help them persist and live authentically. Through these interactions, the participants better understood the answers to the internal questions they had about mattering, belonging, validation, and

engagement. Through this whole process of meaning making, the internal questions and external factors are shaping identity and persistence

According to Tinto (1988), the final incorporation stage calls for a sense of belonging in both the classroom and cocurricular activities. While that sense of belonging is felt at times, the two remaining active students still feel distressed from being misnamed and misgendered by staff and faculty and gaps in technology that make them feel like they still need to advocate for themselves to get by on campus. These students were unable to fully incorporate into the campus as their authentic selves. Even with the addition of the preferred name policy and other resources on campus, the students never felt completely at ease on the GLSU campus. This is illustrated by identity and persistence both stopping before the third stage. This is where the participants are unable to adopt norms to move forward. More importantly, it showcases the ways GLSU is unable to adopt norms to fit the participants.

Figure 6.1



Recommendations for the current policy

As reflected in their individual narratives, the five participants discussed ways they would like to see the preferred name policy change at GLSU. The participants believe that technology on campus needs to be updated to allow their names to show up in CampusConnect and in the university email system. Another point of contention was having to pay for a new picture with the updated ID cards. These five participants thought trans students at GLSU should get one new picture with the new ID card. The participants would also like the faculty to be trained on the policy so they know how to use it, and how to include it on their syllabus. The participants think the university should improve marketing around the policy to incoming students. They felt like that labor fell on them because most students were not aware of the preferred policy when they started at GLSU. Tanner also mentioned changing the name of the policy. The participants do not prefer

their names, those *are* their names. Tanner felt the language of the policy felt "othering" to those that used it, and it gave a false impression to faculty that it is optional to use their names.

The participants emphasized that these changes would be critical for trans students using this policy, and it would improve their overall experience at GLSU. The participants understand why their name cannot be attached to legal documents, but they do not see a reason why it cannot show up in other areas for everyone to see. Ana and Tanner also gave examples of how this already happens for them at their doctors' offices, and they feel like a similar system should translate to GLSU.

Many of the recommendations by the participants are possible, and that has been exemplified by other colleges and universities around the country. The first two schools to add a preferred name policy were the University of Vermont and the University of Michigan in 2003 (Beemyn and Brauer, 2015). These pioneering institutions were able to show how the largest information systems in higher education, PeopleSoft and Banner, could update first names across campus technology – something that is not currently done at GLSU. Since these schools have shown how technology can be updated, most institutions that offer this policy have followed the path of updating technology on the campus.

The administrators at GLSU do not have to look far to see what schools have made the proper adjustments to their name change policies. There are four colleges and universities within a 40-mile range that have more inclusive polices than the one that currently exists at GLSU. All four institutions allow preferred names to show up for students on all campus rosters and on all school email addresses, which are the two

biggest concerns of the students at GLSU. These schools also update on-line directories and notify all student affairs offices on campus once a name change has been made by a student. The one thing that GLSU and these four institutions do have in common is that each still refers to the policy as a preferred name policy. Research has shown that the name of the policy should be changed to reflect that it is not a preferred name, but a chosen name for the student (Beemyn and Brauer, 2015). The participants in this study also mentioned this as a recommendation.

Recommendations for Policy Assessment

As stated previously, trans college students are not a monolithic population; therefore, assessments on policies meant to support these students must continuously take place. GLSU cannot be satisfied with the ticked box approach of just having a policy in place without looking for ways to make policies better (Ahmed, 2012). One way to do this would be to survey the students in the LGBTQ+ Center about campus climate and policies and practices that are both already in place and those that are still needed. As the participants stated in this research, changes need to be made not just to the preferred name policy, but to the overall campus climate at GLSU.

Study Limitations

This study was limited in several ways. First and foremost, the study was not as diverse as it should be at an urban public university. The sample size was not representative of the overall student population at GLSU. All five participants in this study were white students. There is only one non-white student on the GLSU campus who uses the policy, and I was not able to get in touch with her before remote learning

took place. Of the five participants, only one used she/her pronouns, so gender and race diversity were both limited in this research.

The study was also limited by remote learning conditions at GLSU. When the participants were initially interviewed, I met with all of them in my office. My office was central to where their courses were being taken, so it was easy to meet with them there. After the spring 2020 break, when classes went remote due to COVID-19, the participants were much more difficult to reach and to meet with even over email. Of the five participants, only three returned my second set of questions via email. Another student felt tied to his computer and wanted to talk on the phone, and I never really heard back from Ana after courses went remote. This limitation undoubtedly shortened the responses I may have received during a less chaotic time for everyone, and it was difficult to follow up with the students and produce rich transcripts similar to our first interviews.

My positionality to this study may have also limited my findings. Due to the multiple relationships I have with these participants, they may have felt like they could not express their feelings fully about the policy. My professional position as a paid staff member at GLSU, and my volunteer position on campus supervising several of these students in their QSU club may have made it difficult for them to completely open up to me as well.

Final Reflections on Subjectivity

As I mentioned in Chapter 3, I meet all of the sampling criteria of the participants in this study. I am a trans graduate student using the preferred name policy at GLSU. However, I am also a staff member, so that gives me a different perspective than these

students. I have social capital built up on the campus that makes my labor a little easier. When I listened to these participants, I realized how much harder this experience was for them compared to my own experience. They opened up not just to me, but to everyone who reads this research. The labor they took on to tell their stories to improve both the policy and the GLSU campus was important to them. They want the trans students who follow them at GLSU to succeed. They want those students to feel like they matter. I am so appreciative of the amount of labor they took on to help me and everyone else. My hope is that other trans students read their stories and feel less alone while navigating the college experience.

Future Implications

My hope is that future studies on this population of students at GLSU continues to increase just as these studies are increasing nation-wide. The trans students at GLSU want to have a voice in decisions that get made on their behalf. Findings similar to the ones in this research are a great way to make these students' voices heard. This study filled a gap in the literature by focusing on one policy at a single university. Future studies can look at discourse analysis in preferred name policies at institutions similar to GLSU to see how policies compare. This research can also be teased out to understand a larger population of students by increasing the sample size, and even considering mixed methods research, which was something that was not possible with a school that currently has such a small sample size of out trans students using a preferred name policy.

Another thing to consider in future research on this population of college students is terminology used in higher education research. This study used the term persistence to discuss how students move closer to graduation. However, it should be noted that just

moving closer to graduation does not create a sense of belonging for the students. Future research should consider if (or how) students are persisting toward graduation. This would require an examination to understand if they are persisting because they feel validated on campus or if they are persisting because they are just getting by enough to make it to graduation.

When I started this research I wanted to understand how the policy both helped and hindered the participants. Now that I understand their experiences better, my hope is that this research will lead to changes that improve this policy at GLSU. The changes to the policy the participants mentioned throughout this study should be considered so that trans students at GLSU feel safer. It will take more than just changes to this policy however to fully incorporate this population of students on the GLSU campus. The requests of these participants to have faculty trained about the policy will be vital to creating an inclusive learning environment

Summary

This chapter aimed to interpret the findings from Chapter 5 using a social constructivist lens to make meaning of the participants' experiences. I was able to do that by using the framework I created with Tinto's student departure theory and Schlossberg's transition theory. This lens allowed me to see how the preferred name policy helped the students navigate the campus in conjunction with their own labor and faculty support. What was also revealed is that this policy is not enough to help these students feel validated on the GLSU campus. Persistence is negatively impacted by what the students view as harassment and microaggressions from faculty and staff.

The current inquiry contributes to the body of knowledge regarding trans college students, persistence, and policy assessment. The narratives shared by the five participants described how the policy was able to help them, and how the policy and GLSU overall should consider making changes to increase the sense of belonging for these students. Moving forward the recommendations from the participants should be considered to increase persistence for incoming trans students at GLSU.

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Appendix 1 – Interview Questions

Interview Questions
General Introductory Questions

Why did you agree to participate in this study?
How do you describe your gender identity and what pronouns do you use?
What are the reasons you chose to attend Great Lakes State University?
If you feel comfortable answering this, how long have you been using your chosen name?
Please describe your support networks on campus, such as faculty, peers, student organizations, etc…

When exploring the separation stage, I asked the following questions:
Describe your experiences at Great Lakes State University before the policy was put in place or before you began using the policy?
If you've used the policy your whole time at GLSU, can you describe academic experiences prior to GLSU when you weren't able to use your chosen name?
How did you let faculty or other students know about your chosen name before you were able to use the preferred name policy?
Describe for me your level of interaction in the classroom with instructors and other students before you used the preferred name policy.
If you used Blackboard before you used the policy on campus, describe your on-line participation regarding interaction with faculty and students in discussion boards or reaching out to instructors.
Tell me about any negative incidents you may have had in the classroom or on Blackboard before you were able to use your chosen name in the classroom setting
Describe for me challenges you may have faced in regard to using campus resources, such as advising appointments, faculty office hours, and tutoring before you were able to use the preferred name policy?

When exploring the transition stage, I asked the following questions:
How did you find out this university had a chosen name change policy? How was it communicated to you?
What were your feelings when you found out this university had a preferred name change policy?
How did you navigate the logistical process for using the preferred name change policy on campus?
There is an option to get a new student ID: Did you do this: Why or why not?
In what ways (if any) do you think the preferred name change policy could have been better implemented?

When exploring the incorporation stage, I asked the following questions:
Tell me how interactions with students and faculty in the classroom have changed for you now that you use the policy?
Tell me how interactions with students and faculty on blackboard have changed for you now that you use the policy?

What are some examples when you felt like you mattered or were validated by staff, faculty or peers on this campus in regard to your chosen name?
Your chosen name may not show up in all the systems on campus, what strategies do you use to let faculty, staff, and other students know your chosen name if you are afraid it may not show for others to see?
What has your experience been like with campus resources, such as advising, faculty office hours, and tutoring now that you use the policy?
If you have experienced pushback from staff or faculty on campus regarding your chosen name, can you describe that pushback for me?
What positive experiences have you had with staff or faculty now that the university recognizes your chosen name?
What are some instances that I may not have asked about when this policy has been helpful to you?
Please describe any instances that the policy was not helpful to you, or perhaps even hurtful to you.
What changes (if any) would you make to the current policy?
Is there anything else you would like to add?

Follow Up Questions
How was your experience learning remotely during Covid-19?
Did the preferred name policy help your remote learning experiences during this time?
Are there examples where this policy didn't help your remote learning experiences during this time?
Do you feel like your voice matters to GLSU administrators? Why or why not?
If you met an incoming freshman to GLSU who identifies as transgender, what advice would you give them about being a transgender student at GLSU?

Appendix 2 – Recruitment Email

My name is Mitch Lieberth and I am conducting a study in partial fulfillment of my Ph.D. in Urban Education Policy at Great Lakes State University. I am seeking Great Lakes State students to interview for this study who identify as transgender or gender non-conforming, and are currently using the Great Lakes State University preferred name change policy. I was given your name from the Office of Institutional Equity because you are currently using this policy. I am interested in hearing about both your educational experiences at Great Lakes State overall and your experiences with this specific policy. I am trying to meet individually with five to seven students to assess policies that affect the LGBTQ+ student population at Great Lakes State so future implementation of similar policies can be successful.

If chosen for the study, you would be given a $50 Amazon gift card at the end of the spring 2020 semester for your participation. Your participation would require two interviews. The first interview would be about an hour long. This would happen at a time and location of your choosing. Within a month following the interview, I would set up a second interview with you. The purpose of the second interview is to clarify or add to anything you said in the first interview. At that time you will be able to review the transcript from the first interview. This second meeting would also include follow up questions I may have about our first meeting.

Your participation in this research could potentially benefit the lives of future students using this policy at Great Lakes State University. If you are interested, you can reply back to this email or contact me by phone at (216) 402-xxxx with a text or call. You may also contact my advisor Dr. Anne Galletta by phone at (216) 687-xxxx or by email at a.galletta@GLSUohio.edu.

Thank you for your consideration. I hope to hear that you are interested in participating.

Mitch Lieberth
(they/them)