Get over the Binary: The Lives of Trans College Students Today

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A prefix taken from Latin

Definitions:
1) across, on the other side of
   e.g., transatlantic, transsexual
2) beyond, transcending
   e.g., transempirical

“Trans*” not needed and inaccurate
Limitations of Most Trans Studies

- Do not examine the experiences of trans people who have a wide variety of gender identities/expressions.
- Focus on binary trans people.
- Place too much emphasis on transitioning and “passing” or “passing through” trans.
- Involve few younger people, especially those assigned male at birth.
- Fail to consider the different experiences of trans youth.
- Include few people of color.
- Do not examine multiple and intersecting identities related to race and ethnicity, nationality, ability status, class, etc.
- Ridiculously small sample sizes.
Survey Participants

- 3,474 self-identified trans people who participated in an online survey
- 76% (2,648) were assigned male at birth
- 37.4% currently identify on the female spectrum; 34.5% as trans; 19.2% on the male spectrum; 7.3% as another, non-binary gender identity
- 9.5% were 18-22 years old, 16.6% were 23-32
- 15% (524) were people of color
- follow-up interviews were conducted with 301 participants by email, 109 by phone, and 9 in person
Feeling gender different from a young age and seeking to express this difference through dress and behavior

Repressing or hiding these feelings in the face of hostility and/or isolation

Recognizing that there are transgender people

Getting to know about and know other transgender people
Milestone Similarities

1. Deciding on a specific identity
2. Overcoming denial and internalized genderism to accept oneself as transgender
3. Having one’s presentation match one’s identity
4. Deciding whether/when to tell others and developing new relationships after disclosure
5. Developing a sense of wholeness within a gender normative society
The Different Experiences of Trans Youth Today

- Gender-nonconforming, male-assigned children may have had some support for being gender different.
- Likely to have had some understanding of their gender difference as children or youth.
- Less likely to be in denial or be confused.
- Less likely to misidentify at all or for long.
- Recognize that there is not one way to be trans.
- Typically refuse to accept a gender binary.
- Many identify outside of a gender binary themselves and live between the two gender extremes of M/F.
The Genderqueer Age and Gender Divide

- *The Lives of Transgender People* (2011): all genderqueer participants were under age 32; 86.5% assigned female at birth (AFAB)
- *Injustice at Every Turn* (2011): 89% of “gender not listed” between 18-45; 73% AFAB
- Kuper, Nussbaum, Mustanski (2012; n=292, mean age of 28): 73% of genderqueer participants AFAB
- My current study: 87% AFAB
Campus Queer: The Experiences and Needs of LGBTQ+ College Students

Genny Beemyn

Johns Hopkins University Press

Work by Yulonda Rios
College Students with Non-Binary Sexual and/or Gender Identities

- 208 students, ages 17-25, were interviewed from 84 different colleges
- 111 identified outside of a gender binary, including genderqueer, agender, gender fluid, non-binary trans, demigender, and androgynous students
- 102 also identified outside of a sexual binary
- Average age at which they began using their current gender identity label: 19 years old
- 91 of the 111 use gender-inclusive pronouns for themselves; most (91%) use “they/them/their”
College Students with Non-Binary Sexual and/or Gender Identities

- 49% of the non-binary trans students were not out to a parent.
- 70% of the cis participants were out or mostly out about their non-binary sexual identity to at least one parent (48% of the participants of color).
- Of the 99 participants who identified outside of both sexual and gender binaries:
  - Half were out or mostly out to at least one parent about both (59% of the students of color)
  - A third were out about their sexual identity but not their gender
  - Only 2 people were out about their gender but not their sexuality
College Students with Non-Binary Sexual and/or Gender Identities

- In cases where there was a difference in parental acceptance for the student’s sexual and gender identities, sexual identity was almost always more accepted.

**Why the students were not out to a parent(s):**
- a parent(s) holds anti-LGBTQA+ attitudes
- a parent(s) has conservative religious beliefs
- a parent(s) comes from a culture that is intolerant toward LGBTQA+ people
- believe that a parent(s) would not get or not take their identity seriously
- think that a parent(s) would be uncomfortable with their identity
College Students with Non-Binary Sexual and/or Gender Identities

- Where all respondents learned about their identities:
  - a website(s)--59%, a friend(s)--24%, met a person/people who identifies that way or who educated them--24%
- Individuals with lesser known non-binary gender identities, like agender and demigender, were much more likely to learn the terms online, typically on Tumblr.
- The students who had adopted terminology that, at least as of now, is not widely known even among trans people invariably learned it online.
College Students with Non-Binary Sexual and/or Gender Identities

- Where respondents received support for their gender and sexual identities:
  - a friend(s): 79%
  - an LGBTQ+ group(s): 39%
  - a website(s): 28%
  - a campus LGBTQ+ center/office: 27%
  - their partner(s): 17%
  - a family member(s): 17%
  - their therapist or a campus counseling center: 4%
Experiences of Trans College Students

▼ College as a chance to be on their own for the first time and to be themselves, if they could not do so at home or in high school.

▼ Or sometimes the opposite: they had been accepted by their high school and family, and find opportunities to be themselves more limited at college.

▼ Isolation: away from friends and the support they may have had.

▼ Fear of not being accepted and not seen as their gender, especially if non-binary, by faculty, staff, and other students.
Experiences of Trans College Students

▼ If they want to transition, they want to do so ASAP.
▼ Concerns about how they will be treated by administrative offices, especially housing, health care services, and other areas where gender comes into play.
▼ Stress of not knowing how to navigate systems and a sense of processes moving too slowly.
▼ Possible rejection by families when they disclose.
▼ High rates of depression and suicide ideation.
▼ The better the climate, the higher the expectation.
Questions?

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