

**THE EXPERIENCES OF TRANS AND GENDER NONCONFORMING COUNSELORS-
IN-TRAINING: A CRITICAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY**

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ABSTRACT

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This study addressed the lack of empirical research that exists on the experiences of counselors in training who identify as trans or gender nonconforming (GNC). The literature that does exist paints a troubling picture of systemic oppression and othering (Blumer & Barbachano, 2008; Bryan, 2018; Carroll & Gilroy, 2002; Chan et al., 2018; Cor et al., 2018; Shipman & Martin, 2017; Singh & Chun, 2010)—using a critical phenomenological theoretical framework and a queer and trans methodology. This study investigated the lived experiences of trans and GNC counselors-in-training. Participants included seven trans and GNC counseling students attending counselor education graduate programs across the continental United States. Three semi-structured group interviews were utilized to collect data. A post-methodological analysis found three thresholds and five spaces. Threshold 1) Gender (dis/re)orientation, Space 1) (Dis)orientation: The world doesn't get us, Space 2) (Re)orientation: Recognizing Privilege. Threshold 2) Power and Problematization: Action and its cost, Space 3) Problematization

through action, Space 4) Power and Problematization: The cost of continued action. And Threshold 3) (Dis/re)orientation with clients, Space 5) Self-disclosure. Findings are discussed in reference to implications for counselor education programs and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Trans and gender nonconforming (GNC) students experience discrimination and oppression in higher education institutions in the United States (Bryan, 2018; Garvey & Rankin, 2015; Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014; McKinney, 2005; Nicolazzo, 2016a, 2016b; Pusch, 2005; Robles et al., 2019). Although researchers have suggested ways to more equitably serve trans and GNC students (Goldberg et al., 2019; Jaekel, 2021; Jaekel & Holmes, 2019; Shipman & Martin, 2017; Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018), these suggestions are often superficial band-aids that fail to address the deep systemic issues surrounding gender and sexual identity in society. This failure is likely because, as stated by Barton (2010), queer “people are often *talked about* but seldom *listened to*; rarely are they asked about their oppression and the individuals and institutions oppressing them” (p. 466). Several studies have focused on the experiences of trans and GNC students in higher education (Jaekel & Holmes, 2019; Nicolazzo, 2016a, 2016b; 2021; Wolff et al., 2020), but a trans or GNC counselor-in-training (CIT) would find themselves largely absent from counselor education research or lumped together with research on sexual minorities (Chan et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2008; Soulliard et al., 2021; Thacker & Barrio Minton, 2021; Thacker et al., 2021). Focusing on trans and GNC students as a separate group is crucial because they have unique needs and experiences. Trans and GNC voices on college campuses are especially vital as these institutions tend to be places of “cultural enforcement of a rigid masculine/feminine gender binary” (Nicolazzo, 2016b, p. 539). For example, many universities divide housing options, bathrooms, and social clubs by *male* and *female*. This divide creates problems for trans and GNC students, who are forced to make decisions about bathrooms, living in spaces, social events, and activities that do not fully align with their gender identity or create situations that may *out* trans and GNC students. Unintentional outings or discoveries can place trans and GNC folk in danger of violence, rejection, and isolation.

(Nicolazzo, 2016a, 2016b, 2021). Researchers have shown that in higher education, campus climate plays a vital role in the safety of all queer students, especially trans and GNC students. An unwelcoming college climate increases the risks of physical and emotional violence, mental health and academic difficulties, and suicidality (Coker et al., 2010; Craig et al., 2017; Robles et al., 2019). Even on campuses that do not allow overt discrimination, the pervasiveness of gendered spaces can create unsafe climates. Nicolazzo (2021) states that

societal trans oppression leaks into collegiate campuses and into collegiate contexts. In other words, trans oppression does not stop at the gates of the university... There exists a deeply entrenched gender binary discourse on college campuses, which means that trans students continue to confront environments that were/are not constructed with them in mind. (p. 528)

This binary division of gender can affect the overall experience of trans and GNC students, especially students living on campus. Beyond the issue of bathroom access, expectations of gender often lead to students being misgendered based on appearance or the traditional gender expectations of their given names. In addition, university policies can make it difficult for students to change their name and gender on official paperwork, leading to trans and GNC students' being required to come out to each professor at the start of every term (Jaekel, 2021; Jaekel & Holmes, 2019, Pryor, 2018; Swanbrow Becker et al., 2017).

Arguably, the voices of trans and GNC folx should be at the forefront of the fight for gender equality. While everyone is negatively impacted by systemically imposed gender oppression, trans and GNC folx often face increased backlash from those who hold archaic beliefs about appropriate gender roles and gender expression (Butler, 2004; Moulin de Souza & Parker, 2022). Despite this, trans and GNC voices are not just overlooked. They are often dismissed in favor of the status quo of two distinct and separate gender categories (Nicolazzo,

2016a; 2016b, 2021). The socially constructed idea that there are two, and only two, distinct genders is known as the gender binary.

According to Hyde et al. (2019), the gender binary upholds the belief that "one's [gender identity] is biologically determined, apparent at birth, stable over time, salient and meaningful to the self, and a powerful predictor of a host of psychological variables" (p. 171). Kedley (2022a) found that gender binary expectations include how we dress and interact with one another and our role in familial, plutonic, and romantic relationships. Individuals who cross gender boundaries through dress, action, or careers are often teased or bullied for their behavior (i.e., athletic women being called "tom-boys" or lesbians and feminine men being called "sissies"). Or these behaviors are framed in such a way as to make them more palatable to gender binary expectations, such as women's athletic clothes being form-fitting, or men who wear their long hair up being referred to as having a "man-bun" (Kedley, 2022a).

The gender binary is pervasive and can affect our lives and interactions, with or without our awareness, and only "based on our assumptions about genitals and gender roles" (Kedley, 2022a, p. 180). For example, belief in the gender binary has traditionally led to women being expected to perform care work in the home and have limited the career pathways open to them. While more careers are available to women today, Lin and Deemer (2021) found that gender disparities persist in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) despite women earning more bachelor's degrees than men, making up around half of the workforce. Women are overrepresented in work related to care (teaching, nursing, social work, etc.) and underrepresented in STEM. Moreover, Kessels (2015) found that STEM jobs are often stereotyped as masculine. According to Wang and Degol (2017), gender stereotyping around careers happens as early as kindergarten, and parents and teachers often underestimate girls' abilities in math.

Additionally, trans and GNC folx are understood within the gender binary, focusing on those transitioning from male to female (MTF) or female to male (FTM). However, many trans and GNC folx identify as nonbinary, genderqueer, two-spirit, agender, or genderfluid. These terms all express a gender identity that challenges the binary and shows that gender is a spectrum, is fluid, and can change over time. These identities can be the most challenging to society's ideas of gender. They can make it difficult for institutions like higher education to create safe spaces for all students when many campus traditions and spaces have been created with gender binary divisions at the center (Nicolazzo, 2016a; 2016b; 2021). These problems are compounded when gender is viewed at the intersection of other areas of systemic oppression in society, as the gender binary is just one of the tools of white cisheteropatriarchy.

According to Muncaster (2022):

the term cisheteropatriarchy describes a system of dominance where cisgender, heterosexual men are subject to numerous forms of privilege that increase the distribution of life chances in their favor at the expense of trans and queer people, as well as women.

(p. 87)

Cisheteropatriarchy cannot be viewed outside of the intersections of race. White individuals, regardless of sexual or gender identity, will be afforded more privilege based on the dominance of white culture in the US. However, this is not to say that cisheteropatriarchy is only present along with whiteness. There are many communities where women and queer individuals are devalued (Blair & Hoskins, 2015, 2016; Davies, 2020; Davies & Hoskins, 2022; Hoskins, 2020). The division between masculine and feminine is not just about privilege but the active denigration of women and feminine presenting folx. Hoskins (2020) highlights that this hierarchy is seen not just in straight, cisgender communities but also within the queer community. Gender expression plays a vital role in the hierarchy of queer communities.

Davies and Hoskins (2022) define gender expression as “how an individual’s external sense of gender—through clothing, emotionality/affect, behavior, and speech—is conveyed, read, and interpreted by other individuals” (p. 185). Often confused with gender identity, gender expression plays a distinct role in sociocultural understandings of gender. As stated above, the gender binary prescribes norms for appropriate gender expression based on the biological sex and gender assigned at birth. Gender expression is distinct from gender identity and may or may not *match* social and cultural norms around gender. External readings of gender expression are often viewed as being on a scale of feminine to masculine, with androgyny somewhere in between (Davies & Hoskins, 2022). Parsa and Katz-Wise (2021) note that subcultures within the queer community often have distinct terminology for different gender expressions. For example, lesbian women can be described as “butch” or “femme” to denote if their gender expression appears traditionally masculine or feminine. The differences in gender expression, matching with traditional ideas of gender expression and external interpretations, are not benign. They can impact the treatment, safety, and acceptance of queer individuals in public and private spaces like colleges and universities (Davies & Hoskins, 2022; Parsa & Katz-Wise, 2021).

Hoskins (2020) found that masculinity, even separated from whiteness and cisgender maleness, provides privilege and protection within queer communities. Masculine presenting cisgender, white, gay men are privileged above other gender, sexual, racial, and cultural identities. However, masculine-presenting lesbian, GNC and trans men also receive protection from masculine gender expression. In contrast, feminine gender expression among gay men, GNC folx, and trans women is subject to more oppression. In this way, Hoskins (2020) states, “LGBTQ+ communities serve as a microcosm of the broader social phenomena of femmephobia” (p. 2321). Femmephobia, or “the devaluation and regulation of femininity” (p. 2320), is part of the gender binary that serves to create a division between male and female

genders and maintain white cisheteropatriarchal norms. Femmephobia is used to describe how gender policing is used within queer communities. In many ways, it separates the feminine from the “women.” Hoskins (2020) cites femmephobia as the underlying reason that violence against trans women, feminine-appearing men, and GNC folx occurs at higher rates than violence against masculine-appearing members of the queer community. Hoskins (2020) also states that this violence is a symptom of gender policing that focuses primarily on those who do not meet the traditional gender roles assigned to the feminine. Thus, allowing us to see how white cisheteropatriarchal norms not only provide privileges to men and masculine presenting folx (including cis-men, masculine appearing gay men and lesbians, as well as trans men) but also devalue women, trans women, and feminine presenting folx. For example, researchers have found that feminine gay men are considered less desirable than masculine gay men and are often targets of hostility and contempt in the gay community (Bergling, 2002, 2006; Miller, 2015; Sanchez & Vilain, 2012; Taywaditep, 2001). Similar barriers are found in the experiences of feminine lesbians, who are often assumed to be heterosexual based on their appearance (Blair & Hoskins, 2015; Davies, 2020).

Femmephobia is also evident in research surrounding trans and GNC children. Like adults, children who were assigned male at birth and whose gender expression is more traditionally feminine are more likely to be bullied and rejected by peers and teachers (Kiebel et al., 2019; Miller & Behm-Morawitz, 2020; Skočajić et al., 2020; Sullivan et al., 2018; Taywaditep, 2001). They are more likely to be referred for medical and clinical services, including counseling (Grossman et al., 2006; Tosh, 2016), and are more likely than those assigned female at birth to experience anxiety, depression, and suicidality (Harry, 1983; Kuhl & Martino, 2018; Taywaditep, 2001; Tosh, 2016). A direct line can be drawn from the experiences of these children to the experiences of adults being more likely to experience sexual violence and

assault based on biological sex, gender assigned at birth, and feminine gender expressions. Additionally, Lehavot et al. (2012) found that cisgender lesbian and bisexual women who reported having a feminine gender presentation were more likely to report being sexually assaulted than those who self-reported a more masculine gender expression. Femme theory and femmephobia are essential concepts when considering how cisheteropatriarchy is enacted in society. And it provides a critical lens to view how white cisheteropatriarchy is used to police and oppress all femininity regardless of who is expressing it.

Counselor education programs are no exception to white cisheteropatriarchal oppression. It impacts how counselors approach clients and educators interact with, supervise, and teach students to conduct therapy. Equity in counselor education demands that we identify and critically examine how white cisheteropatriarchal systems are present in programs, pedagogies, and supervision models. To do this, it is essential to understand how the social constructions of gender, race, and heterosexism are related to counselor education and the impact on trans and GNC CITs.

Statement of the problem

Little empirical research on the experiences of trans and GNC CITs exists (Blumer & Barbachano, 2008; Bryan, 2018; Croteau et al., 2005; Shipman & Martin, 2017). However, research on queer CITs (some studies do include trans and GNC folx) in general shows that they are experiencing cisheteronormativity and oppression in their programs through microaggressions (Bryan, 2018; Pollock & Meek, 2016; Thacker & Barrio Minton, 2021), harassment (Pollock & Meek, 2016), discrimination (Pollock & Meek, 2016), and lack of focus on counseling issues specific to them (Shipman & Martin, 2017; Singh & Chun, 2010). In addition, the research on the unique dilemmas faced by trans and GNC CITs states that

counseling programs often fail to address these issues (Blumer & Barbachano, 2008; Bryan, 2018; Croteau et al., 2005).

Given the social, cultural, and historical barriers that have been present in the lives of trans and GNC people, counselor education programs must understand their unique needs and create programs that offer the kind of support trans and GNC folx need. Additionally, trans and GNC CITs are the only ones who can speak to their experiences in their programs and how to serve them better. Therefore, it is paramount that additional research is conducted on the needs of trans and GNC CITs. This study seeks to fill this gap in research.

Purpose and Research Questions

This research study aimed to 1) explore the needs of trans and GNC CITs attending counselor education programs in the US, 2) understand the impacts of white cisheteropatriarchy on their experiences, and 3) explore how they reimagine the counseling profession in light of their experiences. To this end, the following research questions were formulated to guide this research:

1. What do the lived experiences of trans and GNC CITs in graduate counselor education programs reveal about the presence of systemic cisheteropatriarchy in counselor education programs and counseling as a profession?
2. How are trans and GNC CITs reimaging the counseling profession?

Significance of Study

Increasing diversity in counseling programs indicates that this study will offer significant contributions practically and theoretically because there is so little research about trans and GNC CITs. This study analyzed the experiences of trans and GNC CITs from their perspective. As Barton (2010) found, gender and affectional minorities are often discussed rather than included

in discussions. This study aimed to centralize the experiences of trans and GNC CITs through phenomenological inquiry. Additionally, this study provides preliminary information about how programs already support trans and GNC CITs and identify areas for improvement.

Theoretically, since this study used queer and trans phenomenology as its framework, it helps counseling programs understand how to address white cisheteropatriarchal systems in a critical and intersectional way to increase equity and support for trans and GNC CITs. While this study was small, the hope is that it will provide rich qualitative data to further the conversation on creating programs that thoroughly prepare all CITs, regardless of gender, to be effective counselors.

Definition of Terms

Definitions around gender and sexuality are continually evolving, and the terms used in this paper will likely be outdated soon (Tilsen, 2021). However, this section is presented with the utmost respect and the goal of inclusion. Many new and changing expressions of sexuality and gender have yet to be identified, named, or brought into the sociocultural vernacular.

Consequently, this definition section was created with the best intentions for the reader's general understanding with the knowledge that, like gender and sexuality, definitions and terms are fluid. (Nicolazzo, 2017). Additionally, participants were allowed to choose what terms, identities, or labels described them, regardless of how terms are defined here.

Cisgender

Cisgender refers to an individual whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth. Beyond that, Enke (2021) explains that the term came from the desire of critical scholars to fight against the erasure of trans and GNC folx by “naming the privileges

associated with being perceived to be aligned with the sex/gender one was assigned at birth” (para. 3).

Folx

The word folks is purposely misspelled in this document, using ‘x’ instead of ‘ks,’ because this is a way of queering words and texts that to a signal of inclusion to identify safe spaces for queer people (Glassman-Hughes, 2022). Glassman-Hughes (2022) states, “the letter x is an orthographic symbol that has become synonymous with gender inclusivity” (para. 2). Other examples include Latinx and Mx (instead of Mr. or Ms.).

Gender Binary

The gender binary is the culturally constructed belief that two (and only two) distinct genders exist. Hyde et al. (2019) describe it as "typically assumes that one's category membership is biologically determined, apparent at birth, stable over time, salient and meaningful to the self, and a powerful predictor of a host of psychological variables" (p. 171). The binary is mutually exclusive, but some acceptance of those who wish to transition from one binary to the other is allowable but strictly policed, as the person must be able to pass as their desired gender. For this study, the assumption is that the gender binary is a false dichotomy that serves to hold up oppressive ideals of cisgenderism and femmephobia (Hoskins, 2020; Nicolazzo, 2017).

Gender Expression

Gender expression is the outward manifestation of gender through sociocultural methods. Nicolazzo (2017) explains that gender expression is enacted “through language, gesture, and artifacts (e.g., clothing, makeup)” (p. 24). While for many, gender expression, sex, sex assigned at birth, and gender identity align in a way that makes sense within the gender binary, for others,

their gender expression may vary daily or be outside gender binary expectations (Davies & Hoskins, 2022; Nicolazzo, 2017; Parsa & Katz-Wise, 2021).

Gender Identity

A person's gender identity is their core feelings about gender that can align with or be distinct from or expand beyond the sex they were assigned at birth. However, not everyone with misaligned sex and gender identity chooses to or is free to live according to their gender or identify as trans or GNC. Gender identity is often connected to the pronouns used and how gender is expressed (Davies & Hoskins, 2022; Parsa & Katz-Wise, 2021).

Gender Nonconforming

Gender nonconforming is not easily defined. For this study, it is used to denote those whose gender identity or expression falls outside the expectations of the gender binary, is fluid, moves between the binaries, or encompasses all or no gender. GNC is left purposefully vague to be as inclusive as possible.

Gender Norms

Housed deeply within the gender binary are the ideas that one's gender determines psychological and personality factors, skills, and abilities for which a person is best suited. Additionally, the assumption is made that individuals are happiest when their gender identity aligns with the sex assigned to them at birth and they live in a way that aligns with the traditional role assigned to that gender (Nicolazzo, 2017). For example, women may be viewed as happiest in a heterosexual marriage, experiencing motherhood, and in the role of primary caretaker of the family and home. Unfortunately, these norms leave little room for personal preference or expression, and those living outside assigned gender roles are labeled aberrant (Davies & Hoskins, 2022; Kedley, 2022a; Nicolazzo, 2017).

Passing

Silvermint (2018) states “that passing occurs whenever an x is perceived as a y , resulting in x being treated or evaluated like a y ” (para. 2). For example, when a trans woman “passes” she is perceived, treated, and evaluated as a cisgender woman. Passing is a complicated and weighted issue that resists being defined in a single paragraph. It is essential to understand that passing is specific to the queer community, but examining other definitions of passing is outside the scope of this definition section. Generally, for trans and GNC folx, passing refers to one's ability to be perceived by others as their gender. Passing can be a complicated issue as it can afford protection and privilege to those who can pass, but it can also serve to erase their identity as a trans or GNC person. Passing can also be a deliberate act by a trans or GNC person to hide their gender. For example, someone who identifies as GNC may, for a variety of reasons, choose to pass as the gender they were assigned at birth rather than come out as GNC. Passing can also be used as a measure for policing if someone is “trans-enough” (Moncel, 2020; Silvermint, 2018).

Pronouns

Pronouns play an essential role in gender identity and expression. While for many, existing singular pronouns that align with the sex assigned at birth are perfectly adequate, for others, often those who identify as trans or GNC, different pronouns or pronoun combinations are needed. For example, the pronouns we are all familiar with, she/her/hers and he/him/his, often work for those who identify as part of the gender binary. However, they/them/theirs have recently become standard singular pronouns for those outside the gender binary. Furthermore, some individuals feel comfortable with multiple pronouns and may express that as she/he/they. While still others choose one or more, they are comfortable with she/they or he/they. Other gender-neutral pronouns used (this list is not exhaustive) are ze/hir/hirs, ve/ver/vis, and ey/em/eirs (Nicolazzo, 2017; Turner, 2022).

Queer

Queer is a term used to describe anyone outside of cisheteronormativity, like gay, lesbian, bisexual, omnisexual, or asexual, as well as trans and GNC folx. Queer was, and still is, used as a derogatory slur towards the LGBTQAIP+ community, but in the 1990s, the term was reclaimed by activists. Queer, as a description, of identity differs from how it is used in queer theory (Weise, 2022). However, it should be noted that many folx remain uncomfortable with the term, and care should be taken when using it to describe others.

Sex

Sex is often conflated with gender. Sex is used here as a biological term separate from gender identity. Sex is linked to the body's physical characteristics, hormones, chromosomes, and primary and secondary sexual characteristics. Determinates of gender are generally determined by the outward primary sexual characteristic visible at (or before) birth. Regardless, biological sex may or may not impact gender identity or gender expression (Kedley, 2022b).

Sex Assigned at Birth

Typically, sex and gender are assigned at, or before, birth based solely on visible physical characteristics despite an infant's inability to communicate their gender identity or expression. The sex assigned at birth determines the gender norms and expression expected of that child, and it is often assumed that sex and gender will be aligned and consistent throughout their lifetime (Kedley, 2022b).

Trans

Nicolazzo (2017) explains that the term trans is “at its most powerful when held as an open question pointing toward the instability of the assumed gender binary, recognizing trans* people as constituting a community of difference” (p. 25). This community of difference includes but is not limited to genderqueer, genderfluid, agender, two-spirit, gender non-

conforming, or has transitioned from male to female or female to male with or without gender-affirming surgery (Wiley & Clarke, 2022). Additionally, trans does not exclude those who choose not to communicate their trans-ness through their gender expression and is wholly based on self-identification (Nicolazzo, 2017; Wiley & Clarke, 2022).

White Cisheteropatriarchy

White cisheteropatriarchy describes how heterosexual, cisgender men are given privileges in our culture, especially if they are white or perceived as white. As a result, white cisheteropatriarchy is upheld by the systemic oppression and policing of marginalized identities, especially queer and feminine people of color, to maintain their sociocultural dominance (Muncaster, 2022; Nicolazzo, 2017).

Summary

The field of counselor education has just begun to scratch the surface of the experiences of trans and GNC CITs. More research is needed to ensure that programs know and address the specific issues they face. It is paramount for counselor education programs to understand how white cisheteropatriarchal systems affect trans and GNC CITs and what they can do to support and advocate for them. The following chapter will expand upon the experiences of trans and GNC CITs, focused explicitly on experiences in higher education.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

To understand the experiences of trans and GNC CITs in counselor education programs, we must first understand the history and context of what it means to be trans and GNC in the US. The term transgender is relatively new and did not come into common usage until the late 20th century. Therefore, the historical context will include other queer identities as well. The following sections will include, first, the histories of the treatment of queer folx and the Gay Civil Rights Movement in the US, as well as the status of trans rights today, and second, an examination of the history, diagnoses, and treatment of queer folx in counseling. Following this section is the theoretical framework and how it addresses white cisheteropatriarchy in counselor education. Finally, I will discuss current literature on the experiences of trans and GNC CITs in counselor education programs.

Historical Context

The term transgender was popularized in the 1970s by trans activist Virginia Prince. Historically, trans and GNC folx were often misidentified or overlooked. Other terms used (historically and still today) to refer to trans and GNC folx include transvestites, cross-dressers, transexuals, or homosexuals (Carroll & Gilroy, 2002; Stryker, 2017). While most of these terms are still used, transgender was preferred by some because they felt that the other terms “referred solely to outward experience and, therefore, neglected other aspects of gender identity” (Carroll & Gilroy, 2002, p. 234). The variations in terminology can make it challenging to identify historical trans and GNC folx for several reasons. Beemyn (2014) states, “people in the past may have presented as a gender different from the ones assigned to them at birth for reasons other than a sense of gender difference” (p. 501). Without primary sources, such as journals and letters directly addressing sex and gender, it is impossible to know the inner thoughts and identities of historical figures. Therefore, historians often overlook trans and GNC folx, especially those

assigned female at birth. Women dressing as men are often seen as seeking only to gain privileges allotted to males of their time (Beemyn, 2014; Cromwell, 1999). While this may be true for some, Cromwell (1999) suggests historians consider how these GNC individuals presented themselves throughout their lives. Did they live as one gender all the time? Did they keep the sex assigned to them at birth a secret, even denying medical care in life-threatening situations? For example, Beemyn (2014) shares the story of “Billy Tipton, a jazz musician who lived as a man for 50 years and who was not discovered to have been assigned female at birth until his death in 1950” (p. 502). Sadly, Tipton’s death would likely have been preventable if he had been comfortable seeking medical attention (Beemyn, 2014). Historians have identified other folx who defied the gender norms of their times and may have identified as trans or GNC today (Beemyn, 2014; Drescher, 2010a, 2010b; Stryker, 2017). However, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss them all. The essential point is that though they may have been called something different, trans and GNC folx have always been with us and have played an indispensable role in the Gay Civil Rights Movement (Beemyn, 2014; Stryker, 2017).

Unfortunately, counseling and psychology historically influenced and were influenced by public perceptions of queer folx. For example, homosexuality was listed as a mental illness from 1952 until 1973 (American Psychiatric Association, 1952, 1968, 1980; Drescher, 2010a, 2010b, 2015; Kirby, 2003; Spitzer, 1981). This pathologization of queerness was a result of psychological research conducted on queer folx prior to the late 20th century, which pulled its subjects primarily from folx who had been institutionalized (Carroll & Gilroy, 2002; Cole & Meyer, 1998), thus skewing results toward pathologization. Additionally, the diagnosis’ inclusion in the first edition of the DSM was likely swayed by the prejudices and the moral panic surrounding the growing visibility of queer folx in the mid-20th century. This panic is called The Lavender Scare (Graves, 2022; Johnson, 2004)

The Lavender Scare began during the Cold War. Queer folx came under scrutiny because they were believed to be dangerous, psychopathic, and mentally ill (Graves, 2022). Additionally, Johnson (2004) states that government officials thought queer folx were vulnerable to blackmail due to the criminalization of homosexuality, which made them a risk to national security (Beemyn, 2014; Graves, 2022; Johnson, 2004; Stryker, 2017). Thus, despite no proof that this had ever happened, it was believed that queer folx “needed to be systematically removed from the federal government” (Johnson, 2004, p.9). This moral outrage culminated in President Eisenhower's executive order prohibiting queer folx from serving in any government job (Chauncey, 2004; Graves, 2022). And required government employers, as well as any employers with a government contract, to actively seek out queer folx and terminate their employment immediately (Chauncey, 2004; Graves, 2022). This order passed in 1953 and remained in effect until the 1990s. As a result, the Lavender Scare was longer and resulted in more people being fired than the better-known Red Scare (Graves, 2022; Johnson, 2004).

Moreover, the impact of the Lavender Scare did not stop with firing and blacklisting queer folx. Government bureaucrats and police also went looking for businesses deemed "gay-friendly." Restaurants, cafés, bars, clubs, and more, were all subject to raid and forced closure if they were seen to be accommodating to or frequented by queer folx (Chauncey, 2004; Johnson, 2004; Stryker, 2017). These raids lead directly to two significant events in the Gay Civil Rights movement. The most well-known of these was the 1969 police raid on the Stonewall Inn, which resulted in a days-long riot that is considered the official beginning of the modern gay rights movement (Beemyn, 2014; Stryker, 2017). However, before Stonewall, in August 1966, an equally influential but lesser-known riot occurred at Compton's Cafeteria in San Francisco. The police were called to remove a boisterous group of drag queens who, according to the manager, were spending too much time and not enough money. When the police arrived and attempted to

forcibly remove them, the drag queens' frustrations about being repeatedly harassed boiled over into violent resistance (Beemyn, 2014; Stryker, 2017), both events led to powerful grassroots activism. Because many trans and GNC folx were involved, support networks were created and grew across the nation, allowing for organized efforts toward queer equality (Stryker, 2017).

Activism also took place in the American Psychiatric Association (APA). Queer mental health practitioners began lobbying for equal treatment and the removal of homosexuality from the DSM (Chesler, 2005; Drescher, 2015). During the APA's annual meeting in 1973, Dr. John Fryer bravely took the stage in disguise under the pseudonym Dr. H. Anonymous. Drescher (2015) states that Dr. Fryer spoke candidly about "the discrimination gay psychiatrists faced in their own profession" (p. 570). He was joined on stage by other queer activists who talked about the societal stigma associated with homosexuality being viewed as an illness. Due to this and other protests, the APA voted to remove homosexuality from the DSM (Chesler, 2005; Drescher, 2015), and they released a statement. In this statement, while they asked for the repeal of sodomy laws and equal rights for the queer community, they also hedged their comments by saying:

In removing homosexuality per se from the nomenclature, we are only recognizing that by itself, homosexuality does not meet the criteria for being considered a psychiatric disorder. We will in no way be aligning ourselves with any particular viewpoint regarding the etiology or desirability of homosexual behavior. (American Psychiatric Association, 1973, p. 3)

While removing homosexuality from the DSM was a victory, this statement by the APA left much to be desired. Although, on the one hand, they acknowledge that being queer is not a mental illness and ask for equal rights, they also leave room for continued oppression in their organization by refusing to denounce homonegative views. In addition, "homosexuality" was replaced by sexual orientation disturbance, and some form of diagnosis related to sexual

orientation remained in the DSM until 1987 (Drescher, 2010a). This ambivalent view of queer folx and the legal structure built by the executive orders made during the Lavender Scare remained in place until the 21st century (Graves, 2022; Johnson, 2004).

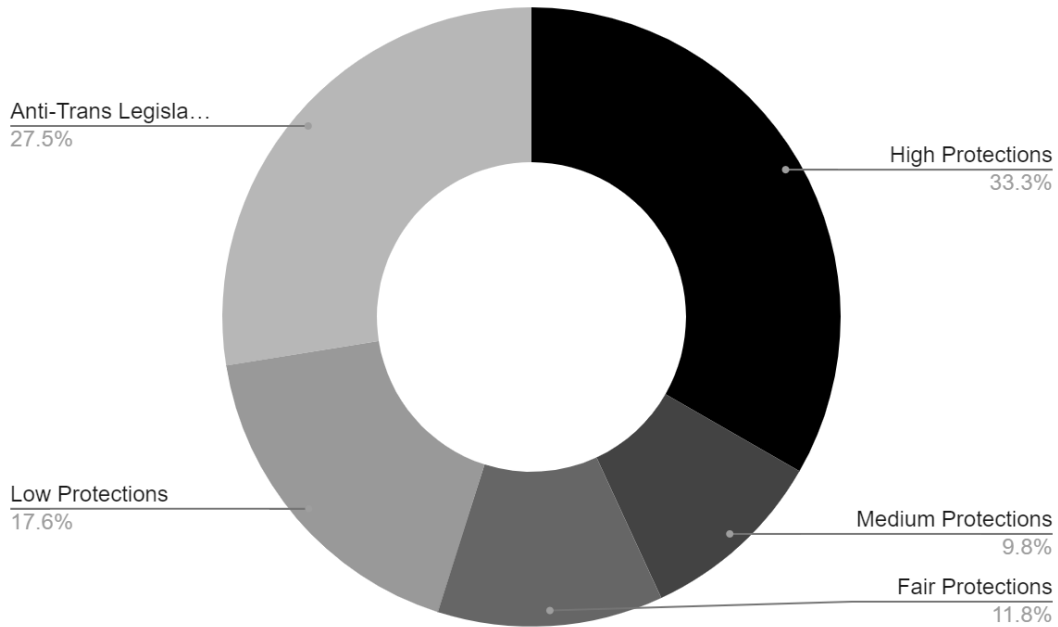
It was not until 2003 that the Supreme Court, in the *Lawrence v. Texas* decision, deemed sodomy laws unconstitutional. At that time, nineteen states still had laws banning sodomy or same-sex sexual relationships. In 2020, 17 years after *Lawrence v. Texas*, employment protections for sexual and affectional minorities were granted under *Bostock v. Clayton County* (Graves, 2022). Sadly, according to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU, 2022a), loopholes in these laws continue to allow states, businesses, and schools to discriminate against trans and GNC folx because they are not explicitly mentioned in the language of federal legislative protections.

Thus, trans and GNC folx were and still are vulnerable to discrimination in many states that have yet to pass explicit protections for them. Trans and GNC folx are still denied services at businesses, denied gender-affirming care, or told which bathroom they can use, regardless of gender identity or personal safety (ACLU, 2022b). According to the Movement Advancement Project (MAP; 2024a), 51% of trans and GNC folx are living in states with "high" to "medium" Gender Identity Policy Tally Scores (GIPTS; See figure 1). MAP (2024a) "tracks over 50 different LGBTQ-related laws and policies... The major categories of law covered by the policy tally [score] are Relationships and Parental Recognition, Nondiscrimination, Religious Exemptions, LGBTQ Youth, Health Care, Criminal Justice, and Identity Documents" (para. 1). MAP (2024b) only includes laws and policies that are on the books in each state. They do not monitor proposed legislation and "is therefore only one measure of LGBTQ equality and experiences. The tally and maps do not...reflect social climate, public opinion, the efforts of

advocates to prevent further negative laws from happening, or the opportunities for future changes” (para. 7).

Figure 3

Percentage of Trans Folx Living in States by Gender Identity Tally Score



Adapted from Movement Advancement Project. "Equality Maps: Snapshot: LGBTQ Equality By State." <https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/>. Accessed 11/06/2022.

MAP (2024a) tracks laws in three categories, creating three sets of scores for each state: 1) Sexual Orientation Policy Tally Score (SOPTS), 2) Gender Identity Policy Tally Score (GIPTS), and 3) Overall Policy Tally Score (OPTS). Scores for each state range from -30.5 to +44.5. MAP (2024b) gives each policy or law a positive or negative point value and adds these together to create a state's policy tally score. State scores are then ranked into High, Medium, Fair, Low, or Negative categories. Table 1 shows the point totals for each category and SOPTS, GIPTS, and OPTS.

Table 1*Point Cutoff for Policy Tally Score Ranks*

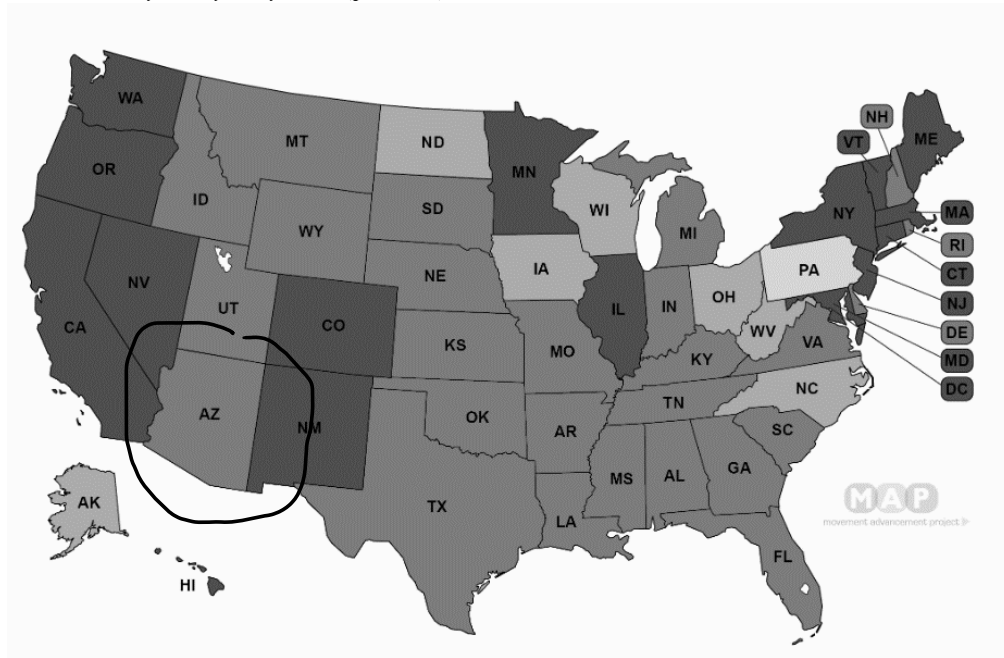
CATEGORY	SEXUAL ORIENTATION TALLY	GENDER IDENTITY TALLY	TOTAL TALLY
HIGH (75-100% OF POINTS POSSIBLE)	16.25+	17.25+	33.5+
MEDIUM (50-74.9% OF POINTS POSSIBLE)	10.75 to 16	11.5 to 17	22.25 to 33.25
FAIR (25-49.9% OF POINTS POSSIBLE)	5.5 to 10.5	5.75 to 11.25	11.25 to 22
LOW (0-24.9% OF POINTS POSSIBLE)	0 to 5.25	0 to 5.5	0 to 11
NEGATIVE (<0 POINTS)	<0	<0	<0
TOTAL POINTS POSSIBLE	21.5	23	44.5

Adapted from Movement Advancement Project. *Frequently Asked Questions*. Accessed February 8, 2024 from <https://www.lgbtmap.org/state-policy-tally-faq>

MAP (2024b) states that they separate SOPTS and GIPTS because “examining sexual orientation and gender identity laws separately illustrates how LGBTQ-related versus transgender-related policies are differently progressing both within a state and across the country” (MAP, 2024b, para. 16). The OPTS combines SOPTS and GIPTS to create an overall score for each state. Figures two and three illustrate why it is important to show each state's SOPTS and GIPTS separately. Taking Arizona as an example, Arizona has a SOPTS of 5.5, giving it a ranking of Fair. However, the GIPTS is -1, which gives it a ranking of Negative. This illustrates how trans and GNC folks are being specifically targeted with negative legislation in many states. Finally, figure 3 estimates the percentage of trans and GNC folx living in each state by the state GIPTS rank. It further illustrates how the civil rights status of trans and GNC folx varies widely depending on the city and state in which they reside.

Figure 2

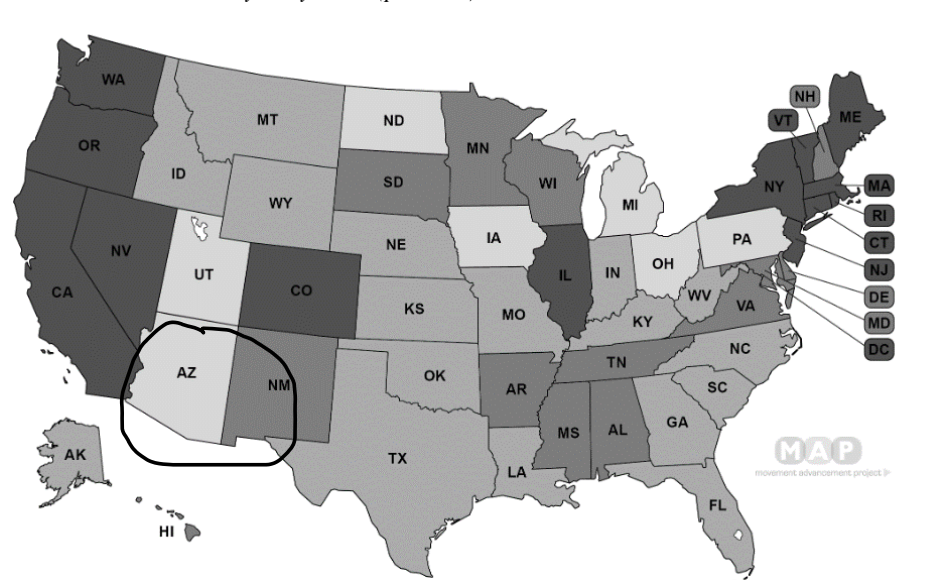
Gender Identity Policy Tally Score (per state)



Adapted from Movement Advancement Project. "Equality Maps: Snapshot: LGBTQ Equality By State." Accessed February 8, 2024 from: <https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/>

Figure 3

Sexual Orientation Policy Tally Score (per state)



Adapted from Movement Advancement Project. "Equality Maps: Snapshot: LGBTQ Equality By State." Accessed February 8, 2024 from: <https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/>

One thing is clear: trans and GNC folx are more vulnerable to oppression via state legislation due to their being largely left out of the Gay Civil Rights movements, despite the

critical role trans and GNC folx played. Janssen (2017) correctly predicted that with the Supreme Court's 2015 ruling giving same-sex couples the same marriage rights as heterosexual couples, trans and GNC folx would become the new targets of those who had opposed marriage equality. Additionally, while many professional counseling associations have adopted stances of support for gender-affirming care for trans and GNC folx, these policies are relatively recent. The APA (Drescher et al., 2018), the American Counseling Association (ACA, 2020), and the American Psychological Association (2020, 2024) have all released a statement fully supporting trans and GNC rights in the last five years. However, diagnoses related to gender variance (gender dysphoria and transvestic disorder) are still in the DSM (APA, 2013). Many critics believe that despite the efforts made to depathologize gender variance, any diagnosis related to gender variance will increase stigma and validate anti-trans sentiment and legislation (Drescher, 2010b; Lev, 2013; Poteat et al., 2019). The following section discusses the history of disorders related to gender variance in the DSM and the current debate surrounding these diagnoses (APA, 1980, 1994, 2000, 2013).

Psychological Diagnosis Related to Trans and GNC Folx

Gender Identity Disorder

Although the term transgender did not appear in early versions of the DSM, some trans and GNC folx were able to receive gender-affirmative care. In fact, in 1931, Dorchen Ritcher received the first documented gender-affirming genital surgery (Stryker, 2017). Ritcher's surgery was arranged by Magnus Hirschfeld, a medical doctor and early advocate for the rights of trans and GNC folx (Stryker, 2017). According to Stryker (2017), "Hirshfeld was the linchpin, and his institute was the hub of the international network of transgender people and progressive medical experts" (pp. 55-56) who were the pioneers and recipients of early hormonal and surgical gender

affirmative care. In 1979, one of Hirschfeld's proteges, Harry Benjamin, established what is now the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH; Devor, n.d.; Stryker, 2017). Coleman et al. (2022) state that WPATH is "an international, multidisciplinary, professional association whose mission is to promote evidence-based care, education, research, and public policy, and respect in transgender health" (p. S5). Indeed, the criteria for gender identity disorder (GID) came directly from WPATH's work. See Figure four for the full diagnostic criteria.

In 1980, GID was added to the DSM just as homosexuality was on its way out (APA, 1980; Dresher, 2010). Stryker (2017) states that this diagnosis was divisive because some viewed it as an unnecessary pathologizing of trans and GNC folx, while others saw it as validating their experiences and as a path to gender-affirming care. Regardless, GID soon became the required diagnosis for individuals seeking gender-affirming care. Carroll et al. (2002) and Meyer et al. (2001) agree that WPATH's Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorders have become the benchmark for the treatment of trans and GNC folx. These standards required that "hormonal and surgical candidates receive counseling and obtain official letters of recommendation by qualified mental health professionals. Those interested in [gender-affirming genital surgery] were also mandated to live as their desired gender for approximately 1 (*sic*) year...prior to surgery" (Carroll et al., 2002, p. 133). Ironically, despite the apparent legitimacy of having a medically diagnosable disorder, insurance carriers considered gender-affirming care a cosmetic or elective procedure, meaning it was not covered (Beemyn, 2014; Stryker, 2017). Therefore, financial cost became an insurmountable barrier to many trans and GNC folx. However, even trans and GNC folx who jumped through all the hoops were not guaranteed care because these standards allowed medical and psychiatric professionals the power to "serve as regulators and

gatekeepers in the transition process” (Carroll et al., 2002, p. 132), especially when treating trans and GNC children (Hill et al., 2006; Wright et al., 2018).

Supporters of GID focused on the negative impact of being trans or GNC and felt that children with a GID diagnosis should not be making decisions for their adult selves about their gender (Hill et al., 2006; Wright et al., 2018). Often, mental health professionals place a higher value on the needs of the future adult rather than the present child. Hill et al. (2006) reported that critics of GID found the conceptualization of the diagnosis criteria to be "homophobic and sexist" (p. 8) and based on strict adherence to the gender binary. As a result, GID conformed to binary and cisheteropatriarchal expectations of gender. Furthermore, the diagnostic criteria for GID relied heavily on binary gender expectations for children's behavior, lacked evidence of reliability and validity, and failed to provide treatment guidelines for practitioners (Ansara & Hegarty, 2012; Cretella, 2017; Hill et al., 2006).

These problems with the diagnosis led to mental health practitioners attempting to resolve GID by helping trans and GNC folx, especially children, come to terms with the sex they were assigned at birth (Hill et al., 2006; Lev, 2013; Zucker, 1990; Zucker & Bradley, 1995). This practice goes by many names but is commonly referred to as reparative or conversion therapy. Drescher (2010a, 2010b) states that the primary goal of treatment for GID (and its related disorders) was to "cure" the dysphoria without changing the sex from the one the client was assigned at birth. Only if this approach was unsuccessful was a transition deemed appropriate.

Therefore, it is little wonder that conversion therapies have become a common practice (Cramer et al., 2008; Mallory et al., 2019; Salway et al., 2021). Despite being denounced as harmful by prominent mental health and medical associations (GLADD, n.d.), there is evidence that conversion therapy continues to be practiced (Mallory et al., 2019). Mallory et al. (2019) found that 698,000 queer adults, ages 18-59, in the US reported that they were survivors of

conversion therapy. Almost half of those underwent conversion therapy before the age of 18. James et al. (2016) found that of the 27,715 trans and GNC folx they surveyed, 13% reported “that one or more professionals, such a psychologist, counselor, or religious advisor, tried to stop them from being transgender” (p. 108). It is especially appalling that conversion therapy continues to be practiced by mental health professionals, as it has been firmly denounced by the ACA (n.d.). The ACA states that they “oppose conversion therapy because it does not work, can cause harm, and violates our Code of Ethics. It is an attempt to treat something that is not a mental illness” (para. 1). Thankfully, rates of conversion therapy do appear to be declining. James et al. (2015) found that younger respondents were less likely to have been subjected to conversion therapy than their older peers. Likely, this decrease is due to the efforts to protect queer youth from conversion therapy through legislation, increased visibility, and activism (Mallory et al., 2019). Currently, 27 states have passed legislation that fully or partially protects queer youth from conversion therapy attempts by licensed professionals (MAP, 2024c). Additionally, as a result of criticism for and activism against GID, the APA removed it from the DSM and replaced it with gender dysphoria in its fifth edition (APA, 2013).

Figure 4

Diagnostic Criteria for Gender Related Disorders in the DSM

Gender Identity Disorder (DSM IV, IV-TR)	Gender Dysphoria in Children (DSM V)	Gender Dysphoria in Adolescents and Adults (DSM V)
<p>A. A strong and persistent cross-gender identification (not merely a desire for any perceived cultural advantages of being the other sex). In children, the disturbance is manifested by four (or more) of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Repeatedly stated desire to be, or insistence that he or she is, the other sex - In boys, preference for cross-dressing or simulating female attire; in girls, insistence on wearing only stereotypical masculine clothing - Strong and persistent preferences for cross-sex roles in make-believe play or persistent fantasies of being the other sex 	<p>A. A marked incongruence between one’s experienced/expressed gender and assigned gender, of at least 6 months’ duration, as manifested by at least six of the following (one of which must be Criterion A1):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A strong desire to be of the other gender or an insistence that one is the other gender (or some alternative gender different from one’s assigned gender). - In boys (assigned gender), a strong preference for cross-dressing or simulating female attire; or in girls (assigned gender), a strong preference for wearing only typical masculine 	<p>A. A marked incongruence between one’s experienced/expressed gender and assigned gender, of at least 6 months’ duration, as manifested by at least two of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A marked incongruence between one’s experienced/expressed gender and primary and/or secondary sex characteristics (or in young adolescents, the anticipated secondary sex characteristics). - A strong desire to be rid of one’s primary and/or secondary sex characteristics because of a marked incongruence with one’s experienced/expressed gender (or in

- Intense desire to participate in the stereotypical games and pastimes of the other sex
 - Strong preference for playmates of the other sex
- B. Persistent discomfort with his or her sex or sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of that sex
- C. The disturbance is not concurrent with a physical intersex condition
- D. The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning
- clothing and a strong resistance to the wearing of typical feminine clothing.
 - A strong preference for cross-gender roles in make-believe play or fantasy.
 - A strong preference for the toys, games, or activities stereotypically used or engaged in by the other gender.
 - A strong preference for playmates of the other gender.
 - In boys (assigned gender), a strong rejection of typically masculine toys, games, and activities and a strong avoidance of rough-and-tumble play; or in girls (assigned gender), a strong rejection of typically feminine toys, games, and activities.
 - A strong dislike of one's sexual anatomy
 - strong desire for the primary and/or secondary characteristics of the other gender experienced gender.
- B. The condition is associated with clinically significant distress or impairment in social, school, or other important areas of functioning.
- young adolescents, a desire to prevent the development of the anticipated second-ary sex characteristics).
 - A strong desire for the primary and/or secondary sex characteristics of the other gender.
 - A strong desire to be of the other gender (or some alternative gender different from one's assigned gender).
 - A strong desire to be treated as the other gender (or some alternative gender dif-ferent from one's assigned gender).
 - A strong conviction that one has the typical feelings and reactions of the other gen-der (or some alternative gender different from one's assigned gender). Gender Dysphoria 453
- B. The condition is associated with clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

The above information was taken from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (1994, 2000, 2013).

Gender Dysphoria

Gender dysphoria (GD) was created to address the critiques of GID by removing sexist and binary language around gender and shifting the focus of the problem from the person to their feelings of distress about their gender or gender expression (Coleman et al., 2020; Lev, 2013; Poteat et al., 2019). See Figure four for the full criteria. Poteat et al. (2019) state that:

The new diagnostic criteria for gender dysphoria in the DSM-5 have shifted the focus more specifically on the alignment of gender identity and sex assigned at birth and take a stance that a trans identity in and of itself is not pathological, but the distress felt from gender dysphoria can negatively impact functioning. (p. 12)

Additionally, some trans and GNC folx have expressed relief at having a diagnosis that legitimizes and normalizes the distress they feel around the gender assigned to them at birth (Lev, 2013). Many believe this diagnosis allows for greater access to gender-affirming medical

and psychological care. Additionally, it provides a space for genderfluid and non-binary folx because it moves away from binary understandings of gender (Lev, 2013). However, despite this updated diagnosis, there is criticism of GD (Lev, 2013; Poteat et al., 2019).

Critics of GD point out that not all trans and GNC folx experience distress regarding their gender identity; therefore, if being diagnosed with GD is necessary to access gender-affirming care, then distress appears to be required as well (Lev, 2013). Additionally, Lev (2013) notes that it is likely that diagnoses related to gender will eventually be removed from the DSM. Finally, Lev (2013) states that the fears about removing gender diagnoses from the DSM creating barriers to gender-affirming care are unfounded because decisions about medical care are made “because medical doctors and surgeons utilize *medical diagnosis*, not *mental health diagnosis*, for medical surgical procedures” (emphasis added, p. 294). Thus, gender diagnoses should not be the concern of mental health professionals who can turn to professional organizations that have published standards, guidelines, and best practices for work with trans and GNC clients (Harper et al., 2013; Cabaj, n.d.; American Psychological Association, 2015). The following section will discuss the competencies for care for trans and GNC folx published by the ACA in 2010 (Harper et al., 2013).

Professional Standards for Work with Trans and GNC Clients

The ACA competencies for working with trans and GNC clients were published in 2010. They resulted from a year of weekly and biweekly meetings of the Society for Sexual, Affectional, Intersex, and Gender Expansive Identities (SAIGE, formerly the Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counseling). By far the most comprehensive, the ACA competencies provide an overview of the necessary framework, attitudes, and beliefs required to work successfully with trans and GNC folx in counseling (Harper et al., 2013). The ACA does not address specific therapies or treatments for evidence-based practice in counseling.

The theoretical framework given in the ACA competencies is based on a wholistic strengths-based model that acknowledges the spectrum of identities housed within the trans label, the influence of intersectional identities and sociocultural biases, prejudices, barriers, historical situatedness, and oppressions experienced by trans and GNC folx (Harper et al., 2013). These competencies focus on the counselor's behavior, attitudes, biases, and beliefs. The ACA states their firm support for the right of trans and GNC folx to live in alignment with their gender identity. They also acknowledge the intersection of social and cultural factors that impact how trans and GNC folx navigate their identities. For example, the ACA requires that counselors understand how transprejudice and transnegativity may affect their client's lives and "how internalized prejudice and discrimination...may influence the counselor's own attitudes" (Harper et al., 2013, p. 143).

Additionally, the ACA identifies advocacy as one of the roles of the counselor. This role goes beyond working towards the best interests of individual trans and GNC clients as they call for counselors to "challenge misinformation and bias about transgender individuals...[and] support a positive, public dialogue that affirms gender expression and gender identity" (Harper et al., 2010, p. 148). The ACA also states that counselors must "understand that attempts...to alter or change gender identities and/or sexual orientation of transgender clients across the life span may be detrimental, life-threatening, and are not empirically supported" (Harper et al., 2013, p. 144). While this statement doesn't mention conversion or reparative therapy by name, if paired with the ACA's (n.d.) declaration on conversion therapy (discussed in the previous section), it is clear the ACA does not support the practice.

While the ACA competencies help provide a framework and aspirational goals for individual counselors and the profession, they are limited in scope (Harper et al., 2013). The fact that they have not been updated in 12 years is problematic due to the fast and ever-expanding

nature of the trans and GNC community. The ACA list of terms in the 2010 document does not include now well-known and essential vocabulary like genderfluid, two-spirit, cisgender, and non-binary (GLAAD, n.d.; Harper et al., 2013). Again, this lack is problematic for counselors looking to the ACA to provide up-to-date information on creating affirmative practices.

Finally, the ACA competencies refer to the ACA Code of Ethics (2014) regarding ethical guidelines for treating trans and GNC clients. However, gender identity is only mentioned once in the entire document in section C.5. Nondiscrimination “counselors do not condone or engage in discrimination against prospective or current clients, students, employees, supervisees, or research participants based on...gender identity” (p. 9). Perhaps the most disturbing fact related to the mental health treatment of trans and GNC folx is that, despite the work of associations like the ACA, trans and GNC folx continue to report higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidality than cisgender peers (Budge et al., 2017; Platt, 2020). In addition, they continue to lack access to gender-affirming mental health care (American Psychological Association, 2015; Cabaj, n.d.; McCullough et al., 2017) and report facing gender-related discrimination from mental health professionals (Moon, 2011; Smith et al., 2012). Clearly, more work must be done to increase access to gender-affirming mental health care for trans and GNC clients. One possible way to increase access to care is by increasing the number of trans and GNC folx who enter the profession. However, we need to ensure that trans and GNC folx will be welcomed and supported in their programs.

Privilege and Oppression in Counselor Education

Counselor education programs (CEP) have a history of privileging dominant cultural narratives and have been microcosms of the larger sociopolitical landscape (Chung & Brack, 2005; Cor et al., 2018). Carroll and Gilroy (2001) state that many CEPs take an assimilationist approach to queer issues in counseling. “The idea behind the assimilationist approach is that

homophobia is primarily a problem of misrepresentation, an effect of inaccurate or absent images of GLBT persons” (p. 52). While it is necessary for trans and GNC folx to be visible and accurately represented, assimilation does not address systemic issues of privilege and power (Carrol & Gilroy, 2001). This focus on identity leads to the narrowing of individuals and communities to a single story or identity (Adichie, 2009). As Carlson (1998) states, it may have the “ironic effect of reinforcing inequalities by making the Other more visible as the Other” (p. 114). Sadly, though many of these critiques of CEPs were written 20 years ago, more recent research continues to call for similar improvement (Chan et al., 2018; Cor et al., 2018; Gess & Horn, 2018; Soulliard et al., 2021). Unfortunately, the continued marginalization of queer folx today is the direct result of the attitudes and beliefs of the past. For example, during the Lavender Scare, many believed that queer and trans and GNC folx were dangerous to others, especially children. Not only was it thought that "gayness" was contagious, but also that queer folx were more likely to commit sexual assaults against women and children (Johnson, 2004). Today, a casual Google search will still turn up articles that claim children are more likely to be sexually assaulted by queer folx (Dailey, n.d.; Meyer et al., 2022; Walker, 2001).

Additionally, according to Moreau (2018), opponents to bathroom access bills for trans and GNC folx often argue that bathroom equality will put women and girls at risk. However, Hasenbush et al. (2018) found no connection between inclusive bathroom access and increased incidents of “assault, sex crimes, or voyeurism” (p. 70). Research shows that queer folx are much more likely to be victims of violent crimes than perpetrators (Friedman et al., 2011; Jenny et al., 1994) and that queer parents are less likely to sexually or physically abuse their children (Gartrell et al., 2011). The view of queer folx as a danger to children has been used, according to Meyer et al. (2022), "to gain support in criminalizing the actions of LGBTQ individuals" (p. 10) throughout history. Today, queer folx are overrepresented in the criminal justice system. Even

queer youth are more likely to be placed in juvenile detention than their heteronormative peers. These statistics, along with the current political climate (discussed in Chapter 1), clearly show that trans and GNC folx face many obstacles in day-to-day life. Therefore, CEPs must be prepared to support their trans and GNC students and prepare all students to work with trans and GNC clients.

Current Literature on Trans and GNC CITs

Presently, research on trans and GNC folx in counseling focuses on the experiences of trans and GNC clients (Bess & Stabb, 2009; Budge et al., 2017; Carroll et al., 2002; Cole & Drescher, 2006; Hendricks & Testa, 2012; McCullough et al., 2017; Platt, 2020; Singh & Shelton, 2011; Walsh & Goldberg, 2020), or the experiences of trans and GNC folx in general (Cavanaugh & Ladd, 2017; Chang & Chung, 2015; Donal & Conroy, 2021; Nadal et al., 2012, 2014; Singh et al., 2014). Research related to trans and GNC folx in counselor education concentrates on teaching queer affirmative practices (Carroll & Gilroy, 2002; Chavez-Korell & Johnson, 2010; Cochran & Robohm, 2015; Cor et al., 2018; Wynn & West-Olatunji, 2009), faculty and supervisors (Gess & Horn, 2018; Shipman & Martin, 2019; Singh & Chun, 2010), and the experiences of cisgender counselors working with trans and GNC clients (Griffith, 2011; Kanamori & Cornelius-White, 2017; Salpietro et al., 2019; Tucker et al., 2021; Wazner et al., 2021). Research on trans and GNC CITs is scarce and generally includes other queer identities (Bryan, 2018; Cor et al., 2018). For clarity, sexual and affectional identities include, but are not limited to, gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, omnisexual, asexual, and aromantic. These identities often indicate who you are sexually or romantically attracted to but are not necessarily expressed through overt behavior (Bess & Stabb, 2009; Blumer & Barbachano, 2008; Carroll et al., 2002). Additionally, specific behaviors or sexual activities do not always indicate a person's

sexual or affectional identity. (Bess & Stabb, 2009; Blumer & Barbachano, 2008; Carroll et al., 2002).

Thus, when calling for more research on trans and GNC CITs, it does not mean participants will not also identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, straight, or any other sexual or affectional identity. It simply means that their identities *include* being trans or GNC. As discussed earlier, the problem with conflating all queer identities is the social hierarchies that can be present within the queer community. Marine and Nicolazzo (2014) state that due to the divisions within the queer community, “trans rights have been largely left out of current ‘LGBTQ rights’ politics” (p. 266). Counselor education is a prime example of this problem. Because trans and GNC CITs have been overlooked, efforts to increase inclusion in higher education have fallen short for trans and GNC students because of the unique challenges they face (Goldberg et al., 2019; Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014; Nicolazzo, 2016a, 2016b, 2017; Pryor, 2015, 2018). The following sections will synthesize the research on trans and GNC CITs. Because of the dearth of research in that area, it will also include relevant studies with other queer CITs and the general experiences of trans and GNC students in higher education. The following sections will be divided into three parts that focus on (1) trans and GNC CITs’ experiences and unique needs in the classroom and university setting, (2) practical settings, and (3) supervision.

Trans and GNC CITs in the Classroom and University Settings

The lack of research in counselor education specific to trans and GNC CITs is troubling. It raises questions about the abilities of CEPs to create safe learning environments for trans and GNC folx. Indeed, the research available paints a worrisome picture of the experiences of trans and GNC CITs (Blumer & Barbachano, 2008; Bryan, 2018; Carroll & Gilroy, 2002; Chan et al., 2018; Cor et al., 2018; Shipman & Martin, 2017; Singh & Chun, 2010). Bryan (2018) focused on

the microaggressions experienced by gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) CITs in their CEPs. She found, in her interviews with 12 LGBT CITs, that students reported regularly experiencing microaggressions from students and faculty. The most common encounters were invalidation, overlooking, or dismissal of their personal experiences. Other common microaggressions were assumptions of heteronormativity and belief in the abnormality of queer identities. All trans and GNC CITs in the study mentioned that they experienced misgendering and felt that they were objects of curiosity for faculty and classmates. Participants also reported intersecting microaggressions of racism, sexism, ableism, classism, and religionism. Finally, many of the queer CITs discussed how the content of their classes and activities further invalidated their right to exist as counselors. For example, queer CITs pointed to the lack of classroom time spent on queer issues and that when queer matters were discussed, it was always from the perspective of a cisgender and straight counselor working with a queer client.

Higher education research into the experiences of trans and GNC graduate and undergraduate students has findings similar to those of Bryan (2018). Pryor (2015) found that all his participants had positive and negative experiences in classroom settings. However, Pryor (2015) states that “overall, they perceived the classroom environment as chilly, if not cold” (p. 452). And that they found classrooms to be places that regularly perpetuated white cisheteropatriarchy. According to Pryor (2015), many students protect themselves from harassment and microaggressions by not disclosing their identities. Even simple everyday classroom practices, like roll call, can harm trans and GNC students who may not be able to change their name on official paperwork, causing them to have to make decisions about sharing their identities on the first day of class. Or potentially being outed to students in the classroom who may know them by another name.

Additionally, Pryor (2015) and Bryan (2018) found that trans and GNC students felt pressure to correct, inform, or educate professors and peers during classroom discussions. While acknowledging that students from marginalized backgrounds provide unique views and help broaden classroom discussions, Pryor (2015) cautions that “although one can learn from the experiences of transgender students in the classroom, placing the responsibility of educating others (faculty, staff, and peers) on them inherently marginalizes and places them at risk for unwanted harassment” (p. 453). Linder et al. (2019) speak to this issue of students from historically marginalized identities playing the role of educator for faculty, administrators, and peers in university settings. This study focused on undergraduate and graduate students in multiple disciplines and from varied marginalized and intersection backgrounds. While no trans and GNC students were included in this study, Bryan's (2018) and Pryor's (2015) findings on the burden felt by trans and GNC CITs to educate their peers in the classroom make it relevant to this topic. Universities benefit from the free labor of activism these students do, as their work improves the campus climate for historically marginalized communities. However, the toll of their labor is largely overlooked. Linder et al. (2019) state that:

Participants engaged in activism as a way to survive in their minoritized bodies on college and university campuses designed to advance traditional forms of learning and formal education...Minoritized students engage in resistance and activism out of a sense of responsibility or survival rather than choice. (p. 47)

The lack of choice in carrying this burden can lead to frustration and burnout on the part of student activists. Students who feel compelled to confront administrators, faculty, staff, and other students face significant “emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion” (Linder et al., 2019, p. 58). Moreover, students with intersecting minoritized identities can feel they must choose which identity to focus on in their advocacy (hooks, 1981; Hoskins, 2017; Hoskins et al., 2017).

Students are not the only ones who feel this burden. Gess and Horn (2018) found that queer and allied faculty in CEPs expressed similar frustrations to that of queer CITs in advocating for queer CITs and clients. While their study did not address the experiences of trans and GNC CITs, it is telling that these faculty members felt similarly burdened to advocate in their CEP and faced parallel obstacles to success. Gess and Horn (2018) call on heterosexual, cisgender counseling faculty to use their privilege to advocate for changes within their universities and CEPs. They also state that advocacy must not only fall to one or even two faculty members but should be a collaborative effort for entire programs. Therefore, CEPs must focus on creating a climate of acceptance and understanding of the unique needs and experiences of trans and GNC CITs as students and counselors. The following section will discuss the experiences of trans and GNC CITs in their practice as counselors.

Trans and GNC CITs in Practical Settings

Two articles, Blumer & Barbachano (2008) and Shipman and Martin (2017), focus on the experiences of trans and GNC CITs as counselors. All four authors identify as trans and write about their personal experiences. Blumer and Barbachano (2008) and Shipman and Martin (2017) stipulated special considerations for trans and GNC CITs and counselors for programs and faculty to consider. Both articles discussed the complexities surrounding the self-disclosure of identity to clients. Shipman and Martin (2017) identified four overarching factors for self-disclosure. First, they discuss the counselor's comfortability with their trans and GNC identity. If a therapist is ambivalent or has internalized feelings of transnegativity, they may not be able to model self-acceptance and affirmation to clients. More self-discovery or processing may be needed before disclosure.

Correspondingly, the second consideration is where a trans and GNC counselor is in the transition process, and the development of their gender identity will be visible to clients. Trans

and GNC counselors who begin or continue their transition while seeing clients may not have a choice about self-disclosure. If a trans and GNC therapist changes their name or pronouns, they must inform their clients. Clients will likely have a wide variety of reactions to this self-disclosure. Trans and GNC therapists need to be prepared for open and authentic discussions with clients about their responses, even if they are negative. Shipman and Martin (2017) state that:

Depending on the existing therapist-client relationship and the client's context, some level of anxiety may be expected for those that have never worked with a transgender-identified therapist. If disclosure is decided, plans to help your clients work through possible negative reactions and/or transphobia will be beneficial. Clear boundaries and expectations are helpful to provide, such as use of correct name and pronouns inside and outside the therapy room. (p. 95)

Client reactions will likely vary based on the hierarchies within white cisheteropatriarchy, which leads to the third consideration of self-disclosure for trans and GNC therapists, examining privilege (Coolhart, 2005; Shipman & Martin, 2017).

As discussed earlier in this chapter, there is a hierarchy within the trans and GNC community that reflects that of white cisheteropatriarchy, which places more feminine-expressed identities at the bottom regarding privilege (Hoskins, 2017, 2020). Reactions of clients, peers, supervisors, and faculty may vary based on societal perceptions of the counselor or CIT. Those who are perceived as female or feminine who transition to being perceived as masculine may experience more acceptance and privilege. Shipman and Martin (2017) also state that “unlike transwomen, many transmen who are prescribed testosterone begin to be seen as cisgender men in society rather quickly. Hormone therapy often takes much longer in transwomen” (p. 95). Bockting et al. (2013) state that transwomen who begin taking estrogen after puberty do not see

modifications to testosterone-related body changes, like build and lowered voice, as quickly, if at all. This means transmen may have more choices about self-disclosure than transwomen but may also feel isolated, excluded, and invisible in the trans community (Shipman & Martin, 2017). Moreover, those transitioning from masculine to more feminine presentations could receive unfavorable reactions from those around them, including clients, due to the devaluation of femininity (Hoskins, 2020). Non-binary folx, especially those using gender-neutral pronouns, may also have more negative reactions. Again, this reaction is because there are privileges to fitting into the binary ideas about gender. In addition, the limitations of the English language can make it difficult for people to adjust to using they/them as singular pronouns (Blumer & Barbachano, 2008; Shipman & Martin, 2017). Coolhart (2005) adds that other intersecting identities could complicate decisions around coming out. And that there are no prescribed steps or one-size-fits-all rules for self-disclosure with clients. All decisions need to be made on a case-by-case basis.

Finally, the safety of the counselor must be taken into consideration. Many studies show that trans and GNC folx are at high risk for verbal, physical, and sexual violence (Hendricks & Testa, 2012). Trans and GNC counselors must balance their personal safety with the ethics of self-disclosure. In these cases, the geographic and sociocultural location of the therapist will be essential, given that attitudes, acceptance, and familiarity with trans and GNC identities can vary (Shipman & Martin, 2017). Trans and GNC counselors must be allowed to make decisions that do not put themselves in harm's way. However, secrecy can be just as dangerous. Blumer and Barbachano (2008) point out that a trans and GNC counselor's safety could be compromised if they are "outed," purposefully or accidentally, to a client outside the therapy room. This exposure could irrevocably damage the therapeutic alliance, as clients may feel betrayed or hurt that the counselor did not disclose their identity personally. Furthermore, this perceived duplicity

could put a trans and GNC counselor in further danger if the client struggles with transnegativity and feels they have been duped by the therapist (Blumer & Barbachano, 2008). Again, geographic location may play an essential role in these decisions, and the smaller the community, the more likely this situation will occur (Blumer & Barbachano, 2008; Shipman & Martin, 2017).

Shipman and Martin (2017) state that the issue of gender in the counseling relationship is essential for trans and GNC counselors to understand because trans and GNC folx play a significant role in exposing and deconstructing the gender binary. Blumer and Barbachano (2008) and Shipman and Martin (2017) cited personal experiences where disclosure of their gender identity in therapy allowed for deeper and more complex conversations around the effects of gender role expectations and binary views of gender on their clients' lives. Furthermore, research has shown that clients view the gender of their counselor as a factor in their choice of therapist and comfortability in therapy. However, counselors often dismiss their gender as unimportant to the therapeutic alliance (Blow et al., 2008; Gerhart & Lyle, 2001; Gerhart-Brooks & Lyle, 1999; Pattee & Farber, 2008; Seidler et al., 2022; Sells et al., 1994). There is limited and conflicting research on the effects of therapist gender on client outcomes.

Staczan et al. (2017) point out that many research studies on gender failed to account for other potential variables, such as therapeutic alliance. Additionally, "most reviews and meta-analyses tended to conclude that there were inconsistent or no relationships between gender and improvement" (Staczan et al. 2017, p. 75) in counseling. Staczan et al. (2017) found in their empirical study of the effects of therapist and client gender in Switzerland that "the sex of the therapist or patient alone may not lead to meaningful answers...success in psychotherapy must be considered a very complex interrelationship between multiple common or general and specific

therapeutic factors” (p. 84). Yet, none of these studies examined how a counselor’s transition might affect the therapeutic process or alliance. Therefore, more research is needed in this area.

Trans and GNC CITs in Supervision

Blumer and Barbachano (2008) reported that for trans and GNC CITs, there are additional considerations around self-disclosure, such as when to disclose their gender identity to an internship or practice site. Or what if, as Barbachano shared in his experience, they are discouraged from disclosing their gender identity to clients by a site or university supervisor? Barbachano stated that “occasionally, I would have to submit to their more conservative professional boundaries, which have historically prevented me from telling my practicum clients about my [gender identity]” (Blumer & Barbachano, 2008, p. 50), despite situations where Barbachano thought disclosure may have been beneficial to the client. For example, when a cis female client expressed not wanting to work with a male counselor, in this case, the therapist’s disclosure of being a transman may have helped the client feel more comfortable (Blumer & Barbachano, 2008). As illustrated here, faculty and supervisors of trans and GNC CITs can hinder deeper therapeutic relationships when they are ignorant of trans and GNC-specific issues in supervision (Blumer & Barbachano, 2008; Shipman & Martin, 2017).

Moreover, trans and GNC CITs may face the same microaggressions and prejudice in supervision that they face in the classroom (Blumer & Barbachano, 2008; Bryan, 2018; Carroll & Gilroy, 2002; Chan et al., 2018; Cor et al., 2018; Shipman & Martin, 2017; Singh & Chun, 2010). They may have supervisors who do not understand their experiences as trans and GNC CITs and lack the knowledge to guide them in making clinically appropriate and ethical decisions. For example, the previous section's main discussion was on self-disclosure of gender identity (Blumer & Barbachano, 2008). While it is essential to consider the trans and GNC CITs’ needs regarding self-disclosure of identity, there are clinical implications that trans and GNC

CITs also need to understand. Shipman and Martin (2017) and Coolhart (2005) recognize other considerations related to the client's sociocultural location that must be considered. First, when working with cisgender clients, trans and GNC CITs may not understand the potential benefits of disclosing their gender identity. Clients may appreciate that trans and GNC CITs have unique gender experiences that may allow for a deeper understanding of the client's experience.

Coolhart (2005) states that clients often express curiosity about their therapists' lives and that all therapists need to think through how their silence may communicate as much as their self-disclosure. For example, if a trans or GNC counselor chooses not to self-disclose their identity, what message does that communicate to clients? Spinelli (2005) states "that one discloses as much by what one chooses not to state as by what one does state. No statement, be it verbal, behavioral, or environmental, is truly neutral" (p. 30). Trans and GNC CITs will likely need guidance in navigating these complex waters.

Trans and GNC CITs also have more to consider when working with trans and GNC youth. Shipman and Martin (2017) point out that many trans or GNC youth and their families live in geographic regions where legislative branches actively seek to restrict their lives. It is possible that knowing that their counselor is trans or GNC could provide a knowledgeable role model, they would not find with a cisgender CIT. However, families not supportive of their child's transition or identity may struggle to be honest about their concerns and grief. In this case, trans and GNC CITs need to be guided by knowledgeable supervisors who can help them navigate these complex clinical situations. Shipman and Martin (2017) point out that even if the parents are likely to respond poorly to the fact that their counselor is trans and GNC, they need to be given a chance to make a fully informed decision about their child's care. The trans and GNC CIT and supervisor must understand the potential damage that could take place in the therapeutic alliance with the parent if the trans or GNC CIT's identity were hidden from them. Shipman and

Martin (2017) also caution that it is not advisable to self-disclose to a child or youth without telling the parents. Asking children to keep secrets from their parents is unhealthy for the child and puts the therapist in an ethically dubious situation. Again, clinical supervisors must be able to understand, predict, and discuss these potential issues when working with trans and GNC CITs. Otherwise, trans and GNC CITs may find themselves in potentially problematic ethical and clinical situations that could have been avoidable with proper supervision.

Self-disclosure toward a queer or trans client may seem simple and obvious. However, Shipman and Martin (2017) advise that trans and GNC CITs must consider each client as an individual. While many trans and GNC clients would likely appreciate having a trans or GNC counselor, it would be a mistake to assume this to be true of all clients. Furthermore, the queer community is not homogenous. Therefore, trans and GNC CITs need to understand that sociocultural hierarchies may affect how clients from queer communities respond. The trans and GNC community has many potential issues that can play out inside therapeutic relationships. Many trans and GNC folx struggle with feeling “trans-enough” within the trans and GNC community. These feelings can be related to whether or not someone has received or is working towards gender-affirming surgical care or how a person expresses their gender and how they are perceived in the trans community. A trans or GNC CIT may be more prepared to have an open and authentic discussion with their clients about this topic. However, if they are not prepared, they may struggle to know how to handle these situations (Hoskins, 2020; Shipman & Martin, 2017).

Finally, the trans community tends to be small, even in larger cities. Therefore, trans and GNC CITs must be prepared to create appropriate boundaries with clients (Everett et al., 2013; Shipman & Martin, 2017). Everett et al. (2013) found that queer (trans-inclusive) counselors often choose isolation from the queer community over the potential for dual relationships.

Everett et al. (2013) argue that this kind of isolation places an unfair and unnecessary burden on marginalized counselors. They state that the language of “current ethical codes assume an unspoken ‘if’ in terms of dual relationships, which ‘might’ happen. This speaks to the privilege of some practitioners’ distance from the lives of clients and normalizes this distance as a measure of professionalism” (Everett et al., 2013, p. 17). This assumption is problematic for trans and GNC counselors who often live, work, socialize, and advocate in small communities.

Additionally, the overemphasis on avoiding dual relationships can force clients to seek counseling from less knowledgeable therapists or not be able to attend therapy at all. Everett et al. (2013) call for more research and an understanding that these types of dual relationships do not have to be negative and can enrich the lives of the client, the counselor, and their community. Therefore, supervisors must be prepared to have open, honest, and authentic discussions around complex clinical and ethical issues trans and GNC CITs may face. However, given the dearth of research on the experiences of trans and GNC CITs, CEPs are placed in a difficult situation of needing information but not being able to find it.

Gaps in the Research

The word “gap” may not be sufficient to describe the lack of information regarding the experiences, needs, and strengths of trans and GNC CITs. In the previous sections, fewer than 30 articles were cited, most of which were not directly related to trans and GNC CITs. The term chasm better represents the scarcity of research in this area and the many questions needing answers (Blumer & Barbachano, 2008; Bryan, 2018; Everett et al., 2013; Shipman & Martin, 2017). This study specifically addressed the lived experiences of trans and GNC CITs in their counseling programs. No study to date has explicitly focused on trans and GNC CITs who are current students and how their programs support or hinder their development as counselors. As reviewed above, trans and GNC CITs face many troubling and complex situations at their

universities, in the classroom, in clinical settings, and in supervision (Blumer & Barbachano, 2008; Bryan, 2018; Everett et al., 2013; Shipman & Martin, 2017). They need CEPs that can prepare and guide them to success. Hence, this study aimed to understand the overall experiences of trans and GNC CITs to provide recommendations for CEPs and inform future research.

Given the continued marginalization and oppression of trans and GNC folx (Bryan, 2018; Chan et al., 2018; Pollock & Meek, 2016; Thacker & Barrio Minton, 2021), this study explored the lived experiences of trans and GNC folx in the context of the systemic and political grounding of marginalization. To do this, a critical phenomenological theoretical framework, with a focus on queer and trans phenomenology, is used. The final section of this chapter explains the origins of classical phenomenology, the development of critical phenomenology, and how this theoretical framework will serve the aims of this study.

Theoretical Framework

Classical Phenomenology - Background

Most trace the origins of phenomenology to Edmond Husserl around the turn of the 20th century (Giorgi, 2010; Kaufer & Chemero, 2015; Magri & McQueen, 2023; Moran, 2000). According to Keegan (2021), Husserl ushered in a new school of philosophical thought that focused on "investigating lived experience, in which the body and senses play an important subjective role in the determination of truth" (para. 3). Husserl's theorizing was a radical turn from rationalism, which had been the primary philosophy of thought through most of Western history. Classical phenomenology, still active in philosophic thought today, acknowledges that first-person experience is essential to interacting with and understanding our world (Magri & McQueen, 2023). Thus, all phenomenologies seek to gain objective knowledge through subjective means and to understand the "lived truth of the subject's experience" (Keegan, 2021,

para. 3). Phenomenological scholars built on Husserl's work and began to shift from philosophy to methodology (Moran, 2000).

For example, Heidegger focused on "the question of being" (Moran, 2000, p. 195). Sartre, according to Moran (2000), "enlarged the scope of phenomenological reflection...through his finely observed description of human action and interaction" (p. 355). Maron (2000) also credits phenomenology with influencing Derrida's concept of deconstruction. However, in 1942, Maurice Merleau-Ponty fundamentally impacted the development of phenomenology as a methodology (Moran, 2000; Kaufer & Chemero, 2015). Merleau-Ponty primarily focused on the "being-in-the-world" (Moran, 2000, p. 391), viewing existence as "corporeal and historically situated" (Moran, 2000, p. 402). Merleau-Ponty (2002) emphasized the inability to view the self as outside its situatedness in the world. Drew (1999) describes this concept as an ongoing and never-ending process because we are always situated in our world and bodies. Therefore, there are always more phenomena to investigate. Magri and McQueen (2023) argue that Merleau-Ponty offered a "style of thinking" (p. 17) about lived experiences that "cannot never (*sic*) be complete since our reflections are always part of a temporal flow *towards* the world (p. 16). Since he died in 1961, scholars have continued to build upon Merleau-Ponty's critique of Husserl and his ideas of embodiment and intersubjectivity to produce numerous critical phenomenologies.

Critical Phenomenology

Critical phenomenology represents a range of modes of inquiry that call attention to "the relation of body, identity, and politics" (Magri & McQueen, 2023, 121). Merleau-Ponty's idea of "being-in-the-world" (Moran, 2000, p. 391) asserts that we cannot bracket systems and structures of power from our study of phenomena (Guenther, 2021; Salamon, 2018). Critical phenomenology identifies privilege, power structures, and historical context as influences that

cannot be removed from one's embodiment or being in the world (Guenther, 2021). Today, much of critical phenomenology is concerned with "gender oppression and racialization, and how they affect self-awareness and social understanding, along with the normalizing and tacit practices that impinge on how sexuality, illness, and disability are thematized and experienced in daily life" (Magri & McQueen, 2023, p. 19). Critical phenomenologies are grounded in the philosophies of Merleau-Ponty, Frantz Fanon, Simone de Beauvoir, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler, among others (Georgio, 2010; Kaufer & Chemero, 2015; Magri & McQueen, 2023; Moran, 2000). Like other critical theories, it goes beyond descriptive analysis to include social critique, political action, and change (Magri & McQueen, 2023).

Lived experiences are impacted not only by personal perception and context but also by the intersubjectivity of experience. Rodemeyer (2017) asserts that intersubjectivity-- how the self interacts with others in the context of the social world (Magri & McQueen, 2023) --provides knowledge about the self. Further, the view of self is constructed based on one's situatedness within power structures. Guenther (2021) found that privilege and marginalization are experiences based on how others react to us and our embodiment in the world. Ahmed (2006) and Butler (1990, 1993, 2004) point out how the world and its objects are made with certain bodies, identities, and experiences in mind. Rodemeyer (2017) agrees, stating that as much as a body can be known or experienced by itself, experiences with intersubjectivity are an essential part of how the self is understood. Writing in the early 20th century, Simone de Beauvoir (2010) asserted that "because the body is the instrument of our hold on the world, the world appears different to us depending on how it is grasped" (p. 66). Therefore, the intersubjective interactions of bodies in the world are not neutral. In the social world, specific identities are privileged over others, which means someone's gender, sexuality, race, ability, class, culture, religion, (and more) of those bodies will impact all interactions (Ahmed, 2006; Butler, 1990, 1993, 2004).

Feminist Phenomenology

One type of critical phenomenology is feminist phenomenology, which utilizes the phenomenological method to understand the gendering of lived experience. Early feminist scholars critiqued classical phenomenology's lack of focus on the intersubjectivity of "social norms, gender, and existence" (Magri & McQueen, 2023, p. 127). *The Second Sex*, by Simone de Beauvoir (2011), was one of the first to engage in a phenomenological exploration of the lived experience of women within patriarchal social structures. The book is foundational to feminist phenomenology. She critiqued classical phenomenologists for viewing lived experiences as universally applicable, ignoring differences around gender. She states, "there is a whole region of human experience which the male deliberately chooses to ignore because he fails to *think* about it: this experience, the woman *lives* it" (p. 737). Universalizing the male lived experience as the norm meant that men are the subject and women are the object.

Feminist phenomenology was developed to assess how women are judged by their ability to live within patriarchal norms and expectations. Beauvoir (2011) goes on to describe how "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (p. 330). While revolutionary, Beauvoir's (2011) critique of the patriarchy focuses solely on the lived experiences of white women. Therefore, she falls into the same trap for which she criticizes classical phenomenology – she assumes whiteness is the norm – therefore excluding the experiences of women with intersecting, historically marginalized identities (Magri & McQueen, 2023; Rubin, 1998). She does not question the gender binary—therefore excluding the experiences of trans women and gender nonconforming folx who are also harmed by patriarchal structures.

In the 1990s, feminist philosopher Judith Butler (1990), in her reading of Beauvoir (2011), puts forth the idea of gender performativity. Butler (1990) points out that bodies present gender through "stylized repetition of acts" (p. 519). These acts are a culmination of practices

dictated by societal norms – or the acts that came before. Thus, argues Butler (1990), there is no correct or universal way to embody gender. Instead, how one performs gender is the result of how one was taught to embody their gender. Therefore, gender is performative rather than a universal state of being. Butler's (1990, 1993, 2004) ideas strongly influenced modern ideas of gender as well as provided foundational materials for many queer and trans study scholars, including queer and trans phenomenologists.

Butler (1990) drew heavily on Michel Foucault's (1978, 1980, 1997) conceptualizations of discourse and power to explain why, despite being performative, people cannot choose how they embody their gender. Butler (2004) states, "gender is not exactly what one *is* nor is it precisely what one *has*. Gender is the apparatus by which the production and normalization of masculine and feminine take place" (p. 42). Thus, those who deviate from socially accepted gender norms are corrected or punished. Those who refuse to embody socially acceptable gender expressions and gender norms are villainized, ostracized, and killed for their gender transgressions (Elliot, 2010; Feinberg, 1998; Janssen, 2017; Margi & McQueen, 2023).

Other feminist scholars of the 1990s and beyond also explored lived experiences of embodiment. Young (2005) utilized phenomenology in her book of essays, *On Female Body Experience*. She explored how unjust constraints continue to burden many women while focusing on little-explored topics like the sexualization of breasts, menstruation as the book ends of the female experience, and the phenomenology of embodiment during pregnancy. Alia Al-Saji (2010a; 2010b, 2009) writes from the lenses of critical phenomenologies of feminism and race. Al-Saji (2010a; 2010b, 2009) specifically focuses on the lived experiences of Muslim women and uses critical phenomenology as both methodology and philosophy in her writing. What is learned through feminist phenomenological studies of the lived experiences of many diverse women is that gender norms and societal expectations do not present an accurate picture of what

it means to be a woman and that gender impacts all aspects of life (Al-Saji, 2010a; 2010b, 2009; Young, 2005). Feminist phenomenology, therefore, is closely tied with queer and trans phenomenologies that focus on the lived experiences of the queer community and their unique experiences with societal gender expectations and roles.

Queer and Trans Phenomenologies

Queer Phenomenologies. Queer phenomenology grew out of queer theory and feminist phenomenology to look beyond binary categories (Cor et al., 2018) and push back against systemic normativity (Tilsen, 2021). Queer phenomenology acknowledges that by the nature of its cultural dominance, heterosexuality represents the *right* or *straight* path. Therefore, anything that deviates from this path represents a *queer* perspective (Ahmed, 2006; Lane, 2021; Magri & McQueen, 2023).

For Ahmed (2006), "orientations are about the directions we take that put some things and not others in our reach" (p. 552). She speaks explicitly about how specific bodies/communities/identities are oriented in a way that deviates from the well-worn paths of accepted white cisheteropatriarchal norms. These queer orientations place particular objects out of or into reach for certain bodies. Objects – in a phenomenological sense - take many forms. They can be physical or abstract. According to Ahmed (2006), our orientation is towards "physical objects, but also objects of thought, feeling, and judgment, and objects in the sense of aims, aspirations, and objectives" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 553). When phenomenology is *queered*, lived experiences and their meaning are seen in context. Often, this means bringing the background into the foreground, which provides insight into how lived experience is impacted by the sociopolitical context in which someone moves (Ahmed, 2006). Queer phenomenology, then, reveals the impact of white heteronormativity and its attempts to mold individuals in the image of the dominant culture. Ahmed (2006) states that:

The queer subject within straight culture hence deviates and is made socially present as a deviant...we do not acquire our orientations because we find things here or there. Rather, certain objects are available to us because of [paths] that we have already taken." (p. 554)

Ahmed (2006) warns that queer phenomenology is not about creating space at the proverbial table for queer perspectives or even creating a new queered table. To transform the queer perspective into the new ideal is merely to trade one rigid ideology for another. Therefore, queer phenomenology, like queer theory, requires a continued dis/re-orientation away from normativity in any form. Meaning that the *queer* perspective is never static, and any research or writing on the subject merely captures the orientations of a single moment in time. Because through telling and retelling, remembering and re-membering, orientating and disorientating, there is a constant reorienting of self, story, and work. Closely related to queer phenomenology is trans phenomenology, which despite being placed last in this section, was built alongside feminist and queer phenomenologies starting in the 1990s. Trans phenomenology focuses specifically on the lived experiences of trans and GNC folx, who are often overlooked or even purposefully excluded from scholarship.

Trans Phenomenology. Magri and McQueen (2023) point out that scholarship on trans phenomenology primarily began in the 1990s. However, it has come into sharper focus in the last decade due to the current debate around the rights of trans and GNC folx. Trans phenomenology takes much from the study of gender and the works of Butler (1990, 1993, 2004) and Foucault (1978, 1980, 1997) discussed earlier. However, Rubin (1998) sharply criticizes the queer and feminist movements for not creating space for trans and GNC folx. Indeed, there continues to be debate on the inclusion of trans women and GNC folx as a part of the feminist movement (Elliot,

2010; Rodemeyer, 2018; Rubin, 1998; Stryker, 2008). There are also debates over the definition of the term trans and who gets to use it (Magri & McQueen, 2023).

Trans phenomenology has already gone through several iterations explaining what it means to embody trans-ness. Feinberg (1999) and Magri and McQueen (2023) point out that trans phenomenology is often situated within the gender binary. The idea of what it means to be trans has often been paired with the idea of gender dysphoria being brought on by one's internal sense of gender mismatching with one's biological presentation of gender. Feinberg (1999), however, points out that this view leaves out many individuals for whom the binary of *male/female* does not affirm or fully encapsulate their gender. Feinberg (1999), Janssen (2017), and Bettcher (2021), among many other trans scholars, agree that the binary is too small to hold the full spectrum of gender expression. Not all trans and GNC folx choose to alter their bodies (Bettcher, 2021) or as stated by Feinberg (1999), "for many of us, the words *woman* or *man*, *ma'am* or *sir*, *he* or *she* – in and of themselves – do not total up the sum of our identities or of our oppressions" (p. 7). Indeed, many trans and GNC folx have no discomfort with their physical bodies (Bettcher, 2021).

Despite this, Janssen (2017) states that the thing many trans and GNC folx have in common is that "simply by being here, by dwelling in the world and being part of others' worlds, the existence of an individual who transgresses gender norms make gender as such conspicuous to others" (p. xiii). Janssen (2017) goes on to point out that power structures related to gender are not merely socially constructed and enacted on trans and GNC folx. Rather, by continuing to "dwell in the world," trans and GNC folx continually push back against those power structures. Looking back on previous movements in critical phenomenology, we can see how the phenomenological understandings of lived experiences can change cultural and societal rules, leading to the loosening of constraints on gender expressions over time. Therefore, trans and

GNC folx are not powerless against these systems, but at the same time, it is critical not to understate the harm being done to those who transgress societal gender boundaries. Feinberg (1999) writes that trans liberation is for everyone because no one escapes the harms of gender oppression—even those who fit comfortably into the gender assumed by their birth sex. Trans phenomenology acknowledges that all lived experiences are worthy of description (Rubin, 1998).

Summary

This chapter provided the historical and contextual background for this study, offered a literature review that synthesized why this study is vital to counselor education, and explained the theoretical framework of critical phenomenology that has guided each step of the study. The next chapter discusses the research methodology, including a) research design, b) instrumentation, c) procedure, d) data collection, and e) data analysis.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Overview

The purpose of this study was to 1) explore the needs of trans and GNC CITs attending counselor education programs in the US, 2) understand the impacts of white cisheteropatriarchy on their experiences, and 3) explore how they reimagine the counseling profession in light of their experiences. The research questions for this study are:

1. What do the lived experiences of trans and GNC CITs in graduate counselor education programs reveal about the presence of systemic cisheteropatriarchy in counselor education programs and counseling as a profession?
 1. How are trans and GNC CITs reimaging the counseling profession?

The following methodology will cover the following sections: a) research design, b) instrumentation, c) procedure, d) data collection, and e) data analysis.

Research Design

Classical Phenomenology

Classical phenomenological research investigates the lived experiences of multiple individuals who share that experience in common (Creswell, 2013; Giorgi, 2010; Lindseth & Norberg, 2022). Carpenter (1995) states that the study of phenomena is most helpful in researching topics that are poorly understood or researched. Therefore, because of the lack of research on trans and GNC CITs, phenomenology is an appropriate methodology for this study. Valentine et al. (2018) describe classical phenomenological methodology as “attempts to identify the *essence* of a phenomenon or experience” (p. 464). The essence of the phenomenon is found by focusing on the similarities across the experiences of many individuals and describing those experiences in a way that others can understand (Creswell, 2013; Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016;

Husserl, 1970; Valentine et al., 2018). Lindseth and Norberg (2022) state, “natural phenomena, social processes, events, human reactions, discourses, practices and so on can be the subject of investigations and therefore be called phenomena” (p. 883). However, a phenomenology focusing only on discovering objective truth within the individual's lived experience is doomed to reinforce systemic injustice (Guenther, 2021; Salamon, 2018) because researchers are in danger of missing the impact of sociocultural context and systemic power structures on participants' lives. This potential outcome is especially true in the case of this study when I, the researcher, am a member of a privileged group studying members of a historically marginalized group. Therefore, critical phenomenology is used to minimize the potential for harm.

Critical (trans and queer) Phenomenological Methodology

Ferrari et al. (2018) state that critical phenomenology “is not a mere descriptive practice, but an enactment of critique, that is, an ongoing process of revealing and interrogating the concrete conditions, institutions, and assumptions that structure lived experience, phenomenological inquiry, and thinking” (p. 1). According to Oksala (2023), this ongoing process rejects the classical phenomenological idea that phenomenological inquiry stops at describing and explaining phenomena. Instead, Guenther (2021) proposes six steps for critical phenomenology:

- 1) The art of asking questions, moved by crisis; 2) a transcendental inquiry into the conditions of the possibility for meaningful experiences; 3) a quasi-transcendental, historically-grounded study of particular life-worlds; 4) a (situated and interested) analysis of power; 5) the problematization of basic concepts and methods; and 6) a praxis of freedom that seeks not only to interpret the meaning of lived experience, but also to

change the conditions under which horizons of possibility for mean, action, and relationship are wrongfully limited or foreclosed. (p. 5)

I used critical phenomenology's "six senses" (Guenther, 2021, p. 5) as step-by-step building blocks for my methodology. In the following section, each sense/step is explained, built upon using queer and trans phenomenology, and applied to the current study.

Sense One: The Art of Asking Questions, Moved by Crisis

Guenther (2021) states that the first three senses are taken from classical phenomenology. Drawing on classical phenomenologists like Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, Guenther (2021) points out that questioning what had previously been considered unquestionable (one's own experience) is where phenomenology began. However, critical phenomenology doesn't question the unquestionable merely for the sake of asking. Instead, the questions found in critical phenomenology come from experiencing or witnessing injustice in the world (Guenther, 2021; Oksala, 2023; Salamon, 2018). For example, I decided to pursue this research after discovering a dearth of resources available for trans and GNC CITs. This realization came about upon learning that their needs were being overlooked or not adequately addressed.

When implementing critical phenomenology using a queer and trans phenomenological lens, questions are often related to the lived experiences of people who identify as queer and trans (Feinberg, 1998, Janssen, 2017). Still, the possibilities of what to question are endless. Janssen (2017) discusses how trans phenomenology goes beyond questions of why someone might identify as trans or GNC to questions about problematizing the term gender itself. Questioning understandings of gender helps avoid reinforcing binary gender. The initial focus of this study was going to be on queer CITs in general, but reading about how trans and GNC folk are often lumped in with other queer identities when their experiences can be unique (Nicolazzo,

2016b) in addition to the current political focus on eliminating trans rights led to the narrowing of the research questions to focus on trans and GNC CITs.

Sense Two: Transcendental Inquiry

Transcendental phenomenology is another name for the shift Husserl created in philosophy (Kaufer & Chemero, 2015; Moran, 2000). To study lived experiences, one must first “abandon the ‘natural attitude,’ which says that for the most part, things are as they appear” (Kaufer & Chemero, 2015, p. 34). The “natural attitude,” according to Guenther (2021), is an experience without examination or reflection. Therefore, this attitude of accepting one's experiences as a given must be set aside or bracketed (Guenther, 2021; Kaufer & Chemero, 2015; Moran, 2000) to understand the lived experience of a phenomenon (Guenther, 2021). Transcendental inquiry, according to Guenther (2021), is a “series of reductions to discover, clarify, and systematize the underlying structures of intentionality” (p. 10), which makes it possible for lived experiences to be studied.

Trans phenomenology, according to Magri and McQueen (2023), has already been through several iterations of this process, as what it means to be trans is still a hotly debated topic. Feinberg (1998) also points out that trans and GNC folx have been understood as being within the binary, as is the case for folx who report experiences of being trapped in the wrong body. However, Feinberg (1998) and Magri and McQueen (2023) point out that these stories do not represent all trans and GNC folx lived experiences. In fact, according to Bettcher (2021), many trans and GNC folx feel comfortable in their physical bodies. Thus, a transcendental inquiry of trans and GNC folx' lived experience requires the questioning of agreed-upon terms. Thus, as much as possible, terms used in this study are defined, and assumptions made explicit.

Sense Three: Historically-Grounded, Quasi-Transcendental Study of Particular Lifeworlds

Guenther (2021) points out here that many classical phenomenologists assume that, while there is no universal truth, they often act as if there is a universal experience. As discussed in the last chapter, many feminist scholars criticized classical phenomenologists (mostly white men) for assuming the male experience spoke for all (Beauvoir, 2011; Magri & McQueen, 2023).

Similarly, Guenther (2019) points to Husserlian historical groundedness as having the problem of overlooking intersubjectivity. Guenther (2021) states, “individual introspection is not enough to pick out the quasi-transcendental historical structures that shape one’s own lived experience” (p. 11). While some critical phenomenological scholars, such as Rodemeyer (2017) and Oksala (2023), disagree with this critique, pointing out that Husserl’s contributions to intersubjectivity are often overlooked or misunderstood, what is clear is that critical phenomenology requires historical situatedness as well as critique. Guenther (2021) calls this quasi-transcendental because researchers cannot fully bracket or set aside their historical situatedness. This concept is discussed further in the next section.

Guenther (2021) points to the example of Heidegger as a cautionary tale of what happens when we use only the first three senses of critical phenomenology. Heidegger’s Nazi ties are well documented (Guenther, 2021; Moran, 2000), and he attempted to use phenomenology to justify his “proto-fascist and anti-Semitic” (Guenther, 2021, p. 12) views. Guenther (2021) explains that this is because “there is nothing in the first three senses of critique to resist the violent appropriation of intellectual traditions and philosophical methods to (re)inforce some forms of dogmatism in the name of defeating others” (p. 12).

Janssen (2017) uses the example of the trans-exclusive radical feminist (TERF) as another way in which critique enacts dogmatic violence on the trans community. Janssen

(2017) states that “there is a claim made by some that transsexuals do a disservice by reinscribing gender norms rather than challenging them” (p. 95). The thought is that they are somehow harming cisgender women by how they perform their gender. Janssen (2017) points out that the burden of dismantling gender norms cannot rest fully on the shoulders of transwomen. And that even though gender is a social construct, it is also not a choice. Janssen (2017) states, “money is a social construct – yet I cannot choose to be wealthy and have it be so simply because of my choice” (p. 95). Thus, TERFs blame transwomen for being subject to the same gendered historical-situatedness that they claim to fight against. While simultaneously disregarding and excluding gender nonconforming folx who often do live outside prescribed gender norms.

For this study, chapters one and two present the historical, cultural, and political climate faced by trans and GNC CITs. Additionally, participants were selected from states with varying levels of oppression and support for trans and GNC folx. Participants were also encouraged to discuss how their other identities impacted their experiences. However, to avoid the pitfalls of reinforcing stereotypes and perpetuating violence as much as possible, this study also incorporated the final three senses of critical phenomenology.

Sense Four: A (Situated and Interested) Analysis of Power

Guenther (2021) states, “there is no outside to capitalism, heteropatriarchy, or colonialism from which to critique these structures and forces” (p. 14). Research and analysis cannot be bracketed to view such power structures from a distant, neutral place. Therefore, the assumption is that these forces are present in all lived experiences, even if the individual subjects do not or cannot recognize them. Oksala (2023) uses Beauvoir (2011) as an example of what happens when power structures are taken for granted. Beauvoir’s (2011) work points out the blind spots of classical phenomenologists regarding women's experiences. While simultaneously being guilty

of similar blind spots when it comes to women who are not white and middle-class. Guenther (2021) acknowledges that to “diagnose, resist, and unbuild [oppressive power structures] from within” (p. 14) is a massive undertaking that will undoubtedly be fraught with mistakes (as in the case of Beauvoir) but also results in steps towards freedom. Guenther (2021) states that:

Phenomenology’s affirmation of the inexhaustible horizons of meaning in any given experience holds open the possibility of unlearning and transforming sedimented habits of thought and being...The existential concept of freedom helps to resist overly reductive accounts of oppression that would seem to foreclose any possibility of resistance given the relentlessness of the structures and systems designed to curtail or destroy freedom. (p. 15)

Ahmed’s (2006) presentation of queer phenomenology takes on many of these “sedimented habits of thought and being” (Guenther, 2021, p. 15). Ahmed (2006) points directly to the well-worn paths of compulsory heteronormativity as its direct result. She discusses how taking different paths orients one toward new perspectives. Thus, by existing in a world that privileges some identities over others, things will be brought into or placed out of the reach of those who walk a *queer path*. Feinberg (1998) makes a similar point that trans and GNC folx challenge rigid ideas of gender just by existing. Feinberg (1998) describes themselves as a “social outlaw...the word outlaw is not hyperbolic. I have been locked up in jail by cops because I was wearing a suit and tie” (p. 10).

Additionally, Janssen (2017) points out how, since the Supreme Court granted marriage equality to same-sex couples, trans and GNC folx (especially children) are the new focus of those who once opposed marriage equality. Janssen (2017) rightly predicts that “the next decade or so will be a fight for the rights of gender transgressive persons” (p. 96). Unfortunately for trans and GNC folx, many people in power have enacted oppressive state legislation and blocked

them from receiving national protections. Therefore, in this study, issues of power are essential to understanding the lived experiences of trans and GNC CITs. Power has been discussed at national and state government levels, as well as power within institutions of higher education from the standpoint of the institutions themselves, administration, programs, and faculty. The impact of these various levels of power is discussed further in chapter five.

Sense Five: Problematization of Basic Concepts and Methods

Guenther (2021) defines problematization as “the practice of articulating and questioning the assumptions that motivate one’s situated interest in justice” (p. 15). Again, Guenther (2021) points to Heidegger, who asked questions without problematizing his situatedness as “a German in a fascist, anti-Semitic, white supremacist state” (p. 15). The problematization here requires a reflexivity of self, assumptions, concepts, and key terms often taken for granted as known entities (Guenther, 2021; Mattingly, 2019; Salamon, 2018). Guenther (2021) cautions that problematizing in isolation can become an endless loop of continuous problematizing that results in no action at all. Instead, problematizing must lead to a community “an emergent we – to respond to problems without assuming that a definitive solution is possible” (p. 17).

Feinberg (1998) points out that trans liberation can only come when issues related to being trans and GNC are considered as essential to feminist and queer movements as the experiences of cisgender women and other queer folx. The assumption is that together, minoritized sexual and gender identities will have more power to enact change. However, Feinberg (1998) also believes that no one should have to choose with which identity they will most identify. Feinberg (1998) states:

Bigotry exacts its toll in flesh and blood. And left unchecked and unchallenged, prejudices create a poisonous climate for us all. Each of us has a stake in the demand that

every human being has a right to a job, to shelter, to health care, to dignity, to respect. (p. 3)

Therefore, in this study, participants were not asked to speak only on issues related to their gender. They were given free rein to problematize terms and concepts related to their identities. Participants chose the pseudonyms, pronouns, and identity descriptors used in this study. Participants were also allowed to edit their introductions and provide feedback on the data analysis. Issues around the problematization of data analysis will be discussed later in this chapter.

Sense Six: A Praxis of Freedom

Guenther (2021) conceptualizes praxis as collective action “rooted in community organizing as the relation between theory, action, and reflection that is explicitly oriented towards resistance, resurgence, emancipation, liberation, or some other way of trying to get (a little more) free” (p. 17). Guenther (2021) also pushes back against the conceptualization of this praxis as a “pie in the sky” or “Pollyanna” view of societal change. Seeing the work through a critical phenomenological and community-oriented lens means that the “inexhaustible horizons of meaning” (p. 15) create “inexhaustible horizons” (p.15) of change, even if that change takes place on an incremental level, one participant or one study at a time.

As discussed in the last section, trans phenomenological scholars, like Fienberg (1998), take a community-oriented view of action. Fienberg (1998) believes everyone should be part of change efforts because everyone will benefit. Trans phenomenology is critical in that every question and inquiry aims to enact positive real-world change for trans and GNC folx, along with other marginalized groups. The potential impact of this study has been one of the focuses of this project from the beginning.

First, while the actual statistics of how many CITs identify as trans or GNC is unknown since they represent a relatively small percentage of the general population, about 5% according to the *Pew Research Center* (Brown, 2022), it can be surmised that many trans and GNC CITs are isolated from others with similar identities. Therefore, one goal of the study was to provide actual connections and support between participants. To this end, interviews were conducted in groups of two and three instead of individual interviews. Participants expressed that this interview style was a cathartic experience, and they felt validated to hear about others having similar experiences.

Additionally, although the researcher provided no identifying information, participants were allowed to exchange information with their group members via direct chat on Zoom. It was made clear that this exchange was only done with the consent of both parties, and the researcher was not involved in these conversations to not pressure anyone to participate. However, there were real-world opportunities to build community.

Second, given the dearth of information on trans and GNC CITs, this study will add much-needed insight into the lived experiences of trans and GNC CITs. The findings discussed in the next chapter provide a starting point for future researchers interested in conducting similar studies. And the final chapter provides implications for counselor education programs and the counseling profession. The goal is that this study will be a small part of the incremental change toward creating more diverse, inclusive, and knowledgeable programs for future trans and GNC CITs. Through this and other studies, we can collectively begin to imagine a different future.

Finally, as a queer person raising genderqueer children, I hope that this imagined future will include a societal and political shift towards a view of trans and GNC folx as worthy of belonging and legal protections. Additionally, I see increasing the number of trans and GNC mental health professionals in the world as only a benefit to trans and GNC children.

Research Plan

Sampling Strategy

Participants were recruited using purposeful homogenous sampling (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). As stated above, the purpose of this research is to study the experiences of trans and GNC CITs in their programs. Therefore, each participant must have lived experience of this phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Smith and Fieldsend (2021) describe purposeful homogenous sampling as a way to “look in detail at the meaning of experience for individuals in this particular group” (p. 150). Therefore, to qualify for the study, participants needed to self-identify as trans and GNC and be enrolled in a graduate-level counseling program in the United States. Recruitment emails were sent to three counseling-related listservs: CESNET, COUNSGRADS, and DIVERSEGRAD. Each of these listservs was contacted in accordance with their protocols. For CESNET, an email was sent to the person in charge to ask for permission to send the recruitment email. Once permission was granted, the recruitment email was sent out three times (the maximum allowed for recruitment requests) spaced over one month. COUNSGRANS and DIVERSGRAD do not require prior permission to send recruitment emails. Therefore, recruitment emails were sent simultaneously with the CESNET emails.

Additionally, I requested permission for a recruitment email to be sent to the SAIGE mailing list. SAIGE is a division of the American Counseling Association that seeks to “advocate for the voice, equality, and inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Gender Expansive, Queer, Asexual/Aromantic, Intersex, Pansexual + (LGBTGEQAIP+) persons within the counseling profession and beyond” (SAIGE, 2020, para 1). SAIGE was founded in 1975, first called the Caucus of Gay Counselors and focusing primarily on gay and lesbian counselors, the name of the organization has changed several times as its purpose and mission have expanded to include a greater number of queer folx. Today, SAIGE is dedicated to improving the lives of

LGBTGEQAIP+ folk through supporting queer practitioners, educating non-queer practitioners on working with queer clients, and lobbying for civil and legal protections of queer people.

Recruitment emails were sent to various contacts in counselor education with requests that they forward them to students in their programs. Following TCU policy, these recruitment emails included my direct contact information and a direct link to the study so that my contacts did not know who, if anyone, responded to the email. A recruitment flyer was posted on the Texas SAIGE Facebook page and the Texas Mental Health Counseling Association page. These flyers were only posted once and were posted by the page administrator. Finally, snowball sampling was attempted. However, participants shared that they knew very few trans or GNC CITs, and no contacts were able or willing to participate in the study.

The recruitment documentation included a link to the screening survey. This survey was used to screen participants for eligibility and provide information about the study so they could decide if they wanted to be contacted for participation. Participants were asked to provide their name and email address if they were willing to be contacted. Of those who took the screening survey, 14 qualified to participate in the study and were contacted by the researcher. Of those, only eight responded and agreed to participate in the interviews.

Participants

Eight people responded to recruitment attempts. Of these eight, one chose to withdraw from the study prior to the interviews due to concerns about being identified through their participation. All data from this person were deleted from the study surveys at their request. The final seven participants were interviewed over two weeks in three separate group interviews. Each participant attended one group interview.

Participants ranged in age from 23 to 40; five participants were enrolled in master's counseling programs, and two were enrolled in PhD programs. Participants were at various

points in their programs. All had at least one practical class experience that included client interactions. One participant had previously worked as a full-time mental health counselor. Participants were recruited from across the continental U.S. and lived in five states. Participants lived in large urban areas (population of one million or greater), suburban cities (population between 100,000 and 300,000), and small or rural cities (population less than 100,000). Participants lived in states rated either high or negative by the MAP (2024a). More specific demographic information was not used to protect participants from accidental identification. Participants expressed concern with even their state being identified as states may have few CE programs with even fewer trans or GNC folx, making identification more likely.

Additionally, all participants are referred to using pseudonyms. Participants were permitted to choose one for themselves or receive help choosing one. The participants who chose to have help were asked questions about their likes and dislikes (i.e., what is your favorite color). Based on their answers, they were given three to four options. Finally, during the analysis, any mention of state, region, or school made by the participant was edited to protect their privacy. Please see Table 2 for a list of the participants.

All participants completed the informed consent prior to participating in the group interviews. Participants reviewed the informed consent via email and signed it or met with the researcher via Zoom and provided verbal consent. A refresher of informed consent related to the focus group was discussed before the focus group recording began. All files with participant information are kept in a Dropbox folder on a password-protected device to ensure the confidentiality of participant information.

Table 2*Participant Demographics*

Pseudonym	Gender Identity	Pronouns	Race/Ethnicity	Age	State GITS	City Size
Lavender Pullman	Gender queer; gender expansive	They/She/He	White	27	Negative	Suburban City
Violet Wolf	Non-binary	They/Them	White	25	Negative	Suburban City
Cat Loaf	Non-binary; genderfluid	They/Them	Latinx	28	High	Large/Urban City
Kai Hirshfeld	Transgender woman	She/Her	White; Ashkenazi Jewish	40	High	Small/Rural City
Liesel Wilde	Non-binary	Xe/Xir/Xirs	Not disclosed	29	High	Large/Urban City
Forest Marsh	Woman, woman-adjacent, transmasculine, non-binary	She/They/It or any	White	23	High	Suburban City
Emily Parkhurst	Transgender woman, transfeminine	She/Her	White	25	Negative	Small/Rural City

Note: GITS stands for Gender Identity Policy Tally Score (Movement Advancement Project, 2024) which monitors state legislation related to protections related to gender identity. States are added points for protective laws and subtracted points for discriminatory laws. This score results in a rating of High, Medium, Fair, Low, or Negative for each state. States with a high rating are considered safest for trans and GNC people, while states with a negative rating would be the least safe.

Note: To protect the anonymity and increase participants' comfort in sharing freely, I chose not to disclose the state where participants live or the type of program they are enrolled in. I did this because the number of trans and GNC CITs is unknown but is likely small, meaning that participants are at increased risk of being identified by the above information.

Trustworthiness

Creswell and Miller (2000) state that determining validity in qualitative research can be difficult due to the plethora of existing methods. Therefore, they recommend that researchers choose their validity procedures based on their lens and paradigmatic assumptions. Creswell and Miller (2000) identify three paradigmatic assumptions in their work: postpositivist, constructivist, and critical. The paradigmatic assumptions of this study's theoretical framework and methodology are both critical in nature. A critical paradigm is built on the assumption that there are hidden beliefs in our everyday narratives and that “what governs our perspective about narratives is our historical situatedness based on social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender antecedents of the studied situation” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126). Therefore, Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest that validity in critical qualitative research requires

reflexivity, self-disclosure, and collaboration with participants. They state that “these procedures help to minimize further the inequity that participants often feel” (p. 126).

Critical phenomenology embraces the subjectivity of knowledge. Therefore, the subject is centered and seen as the expert on the phenomenon being studied. Instead of manufacturing objectivity, subjectivity is acknowledged through the self-disclosure via positionality of the researcher. Additionally, as Guenther (2021) states, critical scholarship often critiques the systems in which participants and researchers live. Meaning that these systems of power and oppression must be acknowledged as impacting all levels of the researcher. I have included a detailed positionality statement and utilized reflexive practices throughout the research process to help elucidate how my positionality as an outsider researcher impacts my research. These practices included immersing myself and citing research by trans and GNC folx, discussing my research, findings, and implications with trans and GNC colleagues, and journaling throughout the research process (Acker, 2001; Galupo 2017; Rosenberg & Tilly, 2021). Additionally, as research cannot be conducted in a vacuum, I utilized the knowledge and experience of peers and mentors to help me see more clearly how my subjectivity may impact the study positively or negatively.

Self-disclosure was also utilized to connect with the participants prior to the email. I sent participants a short introduction (see Appendix A) to myself and why I wanted to research this topic. Additionally, I allowed participants to follow up with questions that helped them feel comfortable sharing openly. I disclosed to participants what information about them would be included in the study prior to the interviews. Initially, this information was to include the region participants lived in; however, it was changed due to participant concerns about the small number of programs in their states or regions. Finally, I have kept participants abreast of the ever-changing timeline for this study.

Finally, Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest collaboration when using a critical methodology. They state that collaboration may take many forms, but that collaboration means “that the participants are involved in the study as co-researchers” (p. 128). There are several components of participant collaboration in this study. First, participants were given the opportunity to provide suggestions in relation to the disclosure of information, and changes were made in the study to accommodate these concerns. Second, participants chose their own pseudonyms, either on their own or through collaboration with me. Many participants expressed excitement that their pseudonyms felt special and unique to them. Third, group interviews were utilized, rather than individual interviews, to allow further collaboration between myself and the participants and between the participants. Kamberelis et al. (2018) describe group interviews as “dialogic events within which the power relations between researchers and research participants are diminished, and people collectively interrogate the conditions of their lives to promote transformation” (p. 694). During group interviews, participants asked questions of each other and offered advice and suggestions. Participants also reached out after the group interviews to suggest other questions or topics they thought about after their interview was complete. Finally, participants were given the opportunity to respond to a summary of the findings. This response was not mandatory, but participants who wished to could provide feedback that was incorporated into the findings section.

In summary, three strategies were used to increase the study's trustworthiness. These strategies, based on the recommendations of Creswell and Miller (2000), were researcher reflexivity, self-disclosure, and collaboration. These strategies are based on the critical paradigm that fits well within this study's theoretical framework and methodology.

Ethical considerations

The ethical treatment of participants was paramount to the study. According to Morrow et al. (2012), no research methodology is inherently ethical. Instead, “researchers must be mindful of design-related decisions and how we are relating to the individuals and communities under study” (p. 106). Therefore, this research takes a trans and queer phenomenological lens to critical phenomenological research, which places the researcher and participant in their sociocultural context and examines “the concepts of power, privilege, and access to resources” (Morrow & Smith, 2000, p. 106).

Participation in the study was voluntary. All participants were given pseudonyms that were used during the interview and in the write-up of the findings. During the interviews, participants were allowed to keep their cameras off to further protect their anonymity. No real names, places, or other identifying information were used in the write-up for this project. The data gathered from participants was treated with utmost care and kept confidential.

Transcripts were de-identified and stored digitally in Dropbox on a password-protected device for interview data. Recordings were also stored in this manner. Only one document, stored digitally in a separate file, contained the legal names and pseudonyms of the participants. All data will be kept for at least three years according to Texas Christian University's policies and may be deleted after that. Participants were notified that they could stop participating at any time before the group interviews. They were also made aware that after participating in the group interviews, their data could not be entirely deleted from the study. Additionally, due to the nature of the group interview, confidentiality will not be able to be guaranteed since there will be other folk present. However, confidentiality was strongly encouraged for the sake of all participants. The researcher guaranteed confidentiality.

Finally, this study is not expected to be more stressful than daily life. As a licensed mental health counselor, the researcher has experience recognizing distress and providing

trauma-informed emotional support. Participants could decline to answer any questions or leave the interview at any point. Crisis numbers and referrals for virtual therapy were on hand to provide participants if they felt distressed.

Instrumentation

Positionality

An essential factor in qualitative research is the acknowledgment of the researcher as an instrument (Adom et al., 2018). Therefore, openness and transparency on the part of the researcher are valued in many qualitative research traditions (Bamberger & Schön, 1991; Conostas, 1992; Creswell, 2013; Duffy & Chenail, 2008; Morrow, 2005; Speciale et al., 2015). However, positionality is more than disclosing sociocultural identities (Cor et al., 2017; Speciale et al., 2015). It also includes the philosophical grounding of my beliefs and worldview, which led me to this research topic and theoretical framework.

This study was born out of a lifetime of curiosity and deconstructing of the white cisheteropatriarchy in which I was raised. Growing up white, poor, and queer in a fundamentalist Christian environment meant that the first obstacle to overcome was how internalized homonegativity and the problematic view of the queer community as dangerous and out to get “us” affected my view of myself. The more I peeled back the layers of these beliefs and the further I strayed from my childhood community, the more open I became to the underlying cultural issues of prejudice and oppression. I also began to understand how I was an actor in oppressive systems. My identity as a white, queer, able-appearing, cisgender, educated woman has given me many privileges to unpack.

As I began a career as a counselor, working predominately with children of color (many of whom were queer) and families living below the poverty line, it became clear how these families were being kept in cycles of poverty and violence because of institutional white cisheteropatriarchy. I reached a point of burnout, and my continued curiosity and desire to deconstruct systemic injustices led me to a doctoral program with a research focus on issues of privilege and oppression in counselor education. As I began researching this topic, I noticed a dearth of research on queer, especially trans and GNC CITs. However, I know that one critique of research on this topic is that participants are being researched about rather than included in the conversation (Barton, 2010). In addition, I understand from my own experiences that looking at only one of my identities would not tell the whole story of who I am. Therefore, I want to ensure that my research will look for the influence of white cisheteropatriarchy in the lived experiences of my participants, as well as how they advocate for themselves and others.

Role of Researcher

The role of the researcher in qualitative analysis is as an instrument of both data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2013). In this study, I also viewed my role as a collaborator with participants (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In this way, it is acknowledged that my positionality and that of my participants will influence the study's outcomes. Therefore, reflectivity and self-disclosure are used not to maintain objectivity but to critically examine the influence of their knowledge, understanding, and experiences on the participants and the analysis of the data (Bamberger & Schön, 1991; Constan, 1992; Creswell, 2013; Duffy & Chenail, 2008; Morrow, 2005; Speciale et al., 2015).

Additionally, my role is managing the paradoxical nature of qualitative research. Lindseth and Norberg (2022) describe this paradox as “understanding always must presuppose understanding” (p. 887). In other words, the role of the researcher is to both “attempt to

understand what it is like to stand in the shoes of their subject” (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 8) and to understand their active role in eliciting these narratives that they are trying to decode (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). In critical phenomenological research, it is understood that any study is a snapshot in time. The findings result from gathering the unique perspectives of the researcher, the participants, and the historical and sociocultural situatedness of the study.

Procedure

Data Collection

During the recruitment process, participants filled out a survey that included a list of possible meeting times for group interviews. Once all participants responded, three meeting times were sent out, and participants ranked their preferences. Participants were grouped by their availability. No other factors were considered when scheduling group interviews. Two groups of two participants and one group of three met over two weeks. During the group interviews, participants were asked to describe their experiences while also reflecting on those experiences simultaneously. Data was co-created through the interaction of the participants and the researcher.

The interviews were semi-structured. According to Gillham (2000), semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to maintain continuity across interviews without controlling the participant’s narratives. Participants are guided to topics but free to share experiences that are meaningful to them. The interviews began with short introductions from each participant and then started with the first question on the interview protocol (see Appendix B). I probed deeper into topics through probing questions used to elicit more information or specific examples (i.e., “Tell me more about...” or “what examples of _____ come to mind?”)

Participants also interacted in a way that provided deeper insight into their shared experiences by asking each other questions and sharing experiences that related to each other's stories. Each group interview also influenced the questions and topics discussed in the subsequent group interview. Therefore, the group interviews influenced each other despite not all participants interacting with one another. Several topics that surprised me were introduced during group interviews. One example was the discussion in the second interview about using gender-neutral pronouns when conducting counseling sessions in Spanish. Additionally, each group interview informed the next. After each interview, the researcher made notes about topics that were discussed. For example, in the first interview, participant discussed the counseling theories they gravitated towards as trans and GNC CITs and how these theories informed their understandings of the use of self-disclosure and cultural competence. Therefore, I asked each subsequent group about their preferred counseling theories, even though this was not a subject I intended to discuss.

All group interviews were recorded on Zoom, as they were virtual due to participants being located across the continental U.S. After the interviews were completed, they were transcribed using Otter.ai before being corrected by the researcher. Once the transcription was completed, all identifying information was edited out of the text. Finally, the transcripts were analyzed during the data analysis process.

Data Analysis

Traditional analysis. Data analysis initially began with a traditional inductive line-by-line coding process. During this process, I started by familiarizing myself with the data during transcription and then through two naïve readings of each transcript. No codes were created during this process, but notes were taken of initial overall impressions. These notes included circling often repeated words and identifying when participants discussed experiences related to

their programs, internship sites, supervisor interactions, and experiences with prejudice or support from others. The next step was to conduct line-by-line coding of each transcript. Each transcript was coded twice in separate documents two weeks apart (not looking at the data in between) and then compared. During the second line-by-line coding, other possible themes emerged including allyship, self-advocacy, self-disclosure decisions, gender identity journey, intersecting identities, and unanswered questions. Comparing these two rounds of line-by-line coding showed similar results. However, during this part of the process, a problem began to emerge. While I began to see potential themes emerging, they felt too broad and failed to address the nuances of the participant's experiences. Instead of themes, these felt more like topics that related to the lived experiences of the participants but didn't capture the essential qualities of those experiences. I hoped that as I continued to work with the data, I would be able to force it to play nicely and fit into traditional themes and subthemes. Frustratingly, the data continued to feel unruly and difficult to pin down. I hoped that places would emerge within each subtheme to place quotes from the miscellaneous section. However, this was not the case. I came back to Ahmed's (2006) idea of (dis/re)orientation again and again. I began to feel that I was attempting to "unqueer" my data by attempting it to fit into traditional methods. I decided, after much agonizing, to restart the process utilizing post-methodological analysis. I believe that the data resisted this traditional method because it failed to authentically capture the experiences of my participants and the othering central to being a trans and GNC CIT in counselor education. The reality of their experience seemed to be located at multiple, unique intersections of identity, power, and context. Each created a space that defies straightforward categorization and interpretation. Therefore, in the face of (dis)orientation, I chose to (re)orient myself away from traditional analysis towards a critical analysis using Guenther's (2021) fourth and fifth steps (as

discussed previously) in combination with Jackson and Mazzei's (2012) post-methodological analysis of "thinking with theory" (p. vi).

Post-methodological data analysis. To help myself move away from the traditional process of coding, I decided to take my analysis off the computer to allow myself to play more openly with the data. To accomplish this, I organized quotes on a spreadsheet by topic. I grouped the original themes and created a spreadsheet for each one. These topics were: Allyship, Self-Advocacy, Self-disclosure, Gender-Identity Journey, Intersecting Identities, Job Market, and Miscellaneous. First, I put every quote from each group interview into the spreadsheet under one of the categories. Looking back, the categorization of quotes was unnecessary, but it felt less chaotic to have the quotes in some kind of categorization because there was so much data. Included with each quote were the participant's pseudonym, the number of the group they attended, and the page of the transcript that the quote came from. Then, I printed each sheet, cut out the quotes, and glued them to large index cards. Each participant had their own color index card, so it was clear who was represented as I sorted the quotes (see Appendix C for photos of the index cards).

Thinking with Theory – Thresholds. Once the index cards were ready, I found I was drawn toward Jackson and Mazzei's (2012) ideas because, like myself, they found traditional analysis fails "to critique the complexities of social life" (p. iv). Instead, they chose to view their data through the "threshold" (p. 6), that is, the "doing and using" (p. 7) of theory to resist "fixed meanings" (p. 8) in favor of transformation. This is where the continued interaction between theory and data; data and theory occurs and becomes an in-between space of "re-telling and remembering" (p. ix). Thresholds are the in-between space. They exist only in reference to their connection to other spaces (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). The threshold is also the intersection of

multiple spaces. They are sites of convergence and multiple meanings (Duran et al., 2021). They are “not quite as linear or definitive as one may think” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 6).

The concept of thresholds has been used by other researchers in data analysis (Duran et al., 2021; Gross & McInerney, 2016; Jourian, 2017; Kuby et al., 2016; Nicolazzo, 2016a). For this study, the threshold is where data and theory are plugged into each other. This allowed each threshold to highlight the multiplicity of the lived experiences within the data (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). No threshold will fully capture the lived experiences of all participants, nor will it necessarily provide a static or concrete theme or takeaway from the data. As Nicolazzo (2016a) did, I used “the space of the threshold to as an analytical tool...as well as [to] depict the excess of ways in which data could be (re)interpreted to provide varied and complex understandings of participants’ lives” (p. 7).

The threshold became the space to explore tensions created by participants' lived experiences as trans and GNC CITs. Questions around power (sense four), privilege, marginalization, self-advocacy, and tokenism surfaced within the three thresholds (Guenther, 2021; Nicolazzo, 2016a; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Throughout the analysis process, issues of power and the influence of white cisheteropatriarchy were assumed to be part of the context of each threshold. All while remaining focused on the (dis/re)orientation and influences of gender identity.

Additionally, concepts, terms, and names were problematized (sense five) to break them down to their essence and identify the way the researcher conceptualized and defined the terms (Guenther, 2021). Finally, concepts were not simplified and categorized to make them easier to digest. Instead, the analysis leaned into the (dis)organization created by the tensions found in each threshold (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). This process was completed by sorting and re-sorting quotes into many potential categories and organizations. There were four official rounds of

coding with the index cards. During each round, I read through each quote as I flipped through the index cards, sorting them in stacks with other quotes that spoke of similar topics. For each round, I would make notes on the index cards referring to which stack it ended up in. The final write-up did not include any quotes that ended up alone for multiple rounds or did not have sufficient support from other quotes. The topics discussed in these quotes are included in the further research section in chapter five.

After the fourth round of sorting, each stack of quotes was sorted utilizing the idea of a threshold as a liminal space where lived experiences (i.e., quotes) met with Guenther's (2021) fifth and sixth senses and the study's theoretical framework. Each threshold had multiple liminal spaces representing how theory, researcher, and participants met with the theory to create the findings discussed in Chapter Four (Guenther, 2021; Nicolazzo, 2016a; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012).

Limitations

One possible limitation of this research study is me, the researcher. I became interested in this topic because of my experiences working with and speaking to trans and GNC folx while living in a state with an anti-trans legislative agenda. As a result, many of the researcher's experiences have been hearing the harmful side of being trans and GNC in counselor education. Furthermore, despite using reflexive practices, collaboration, and self-disclosure throughout the study, there may still be biases of which I am unaware.

Moreover, it is understood that sexual orientation and gender identities are different and should be researched separately. The same may be true for differing gender identities. The findings show that GNC participants were more likely to struggle with being misgendered. It is possible that further research will provide more evidence of disparate experiences between those who prefer gender-neutral pronouns and those who fit more easily into the gender binary.

Additionally, trans men were not represented in this study and the majority of participants identified as white. A more diverse sampling may have yielded different results.

Summary

This chapter explored the methodology utilized in this study, including how and why participants were chosen, the methods utilized in gathering and interpreting data, and how these align with the study's research goals. Additionally, ethical considerations, researcher positionality, and limitations were discussed. In the next chapter, the findings of the study will be presented.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This critical phenomenological inquiry aims to explore the lived experiences of trans and GNC CITs in their programs. After conducting the semi-structured group interviews, data were analyzed using Guenther's (2021) fourth and fifth senses and Jackson and Mazzi's (2012) post-methodological concept of thresholds. This chapter presents those findings to address the following research questions: 1) What do the lived experiences of trans and GNC CITs in graduate counselor education programs reveal about the presence of systemic cisheteropatriarchy in counselor education programs and counseling as a profession? 2) How are trans and GNC CITs reimagining the counseling profession? In order to provide support and deeper descriptions, participant quotes are utilized throughout this chapter. Quotes from participants are presented in italics and edited for clarity when necessary.

The findings of the study include three thresholds: Gender (dis/re)orientations, Power and Problematization, and (dis/re)orientations with clients. Two spaces were created related to threshold one: Gender (Dis/re)orientations 1) The world doesn't get us and 2) (Re)orientations: Recognizing Privilege. In threshold two, Power and Problematization, two spaces were identified: 1) Problematization through Action and 2) Power: The Cost of Continued Action. Threshold three stands alone as (Dis/re)orientation with clients. Each threshold represents a liminal space where theory (critical phenomenology) meets with participants' lived experiences and participants'/researcher's sociocultural context. Each space within the threshold examines the tensions created by the complexities within participants' experiences. The following sections attempt to explain these tensions in a way that doesn't water them down or simplify them to the point that nuance is lost.

Threshold One: Gender (dis)orientations

The first threshold looks at how Ahmed's (2006) idea of (dis)orientations in queer phenomenology transforms the data when it intersects with trans and GNC CITs experience in CE programs. Ahmed (2006) describes gender as being acted out through the "repetition of movement" and the "occupying of certain domains," which in turn becomes orientations "towards certain objects" (p. 56). "Objects, as well as spaces, are made for some kinds of bodies more than others" (p. 51). This is true for universities and counseling programs, where many were originally created with white, straight, cis men in mind (Blumer & Barbachano, 2008; Bryan, 2018; Croteau et al., 2005; Shipman & Martin, 2017). For example, as discussed above, many university spaces are binarily gendered (housing, clubs, etc.) and, therefore, created for those who fit traditional binary genders (Nicolazzo, 2016a, 2016b, 2021). Gender (dis)orientation, therefore, happens when trans and GNC CITs expose the binary characteristics of their programs because they, by their very existence, transgress the gender binary. The following are the results of the threshold. Gender (dis)orientation is the othering that trans and GNC CITs feel when they do not fit into the traditional spaces of their programs (i.e., Space One). This (dis)orientation then requires trans and GNC CITs to (re)orient themselves to new ways of thinking (i.e., Space Two).

Space One: (Dis)orientation: The World Doesn't Get Us

The first space explores participants' (dis)orientation when met with incidents of cisgenderism and heterosexism within their programs. Participants discussed frequent (dis)orientation moments related to reminders that their experiences and identities were not "typical" of the CIT experience. Participants discussed how this (dis)orienting space differs in their CE programs. First, while every participant made it clear that their overall experiences in their program were positive, they quickly recalled the more negative experiences they had related to their trans and GNC identities. Kai shared that *I've learned a lot about privilege and*

marginalization by moving from presenting as a cis man to presenting as a trans woman. She discusses how her (dis)orientation, coupled with her visible identity as a trans woman, has impacted her understanding.

I think that one of the more ubiquitous experiences or recognitions since coming out is just the realization that my experience is a minority one. That most people don't get what it feels like to be me. And they don't think about what it might feel like to be me. Because you know, to be fair, why would they? And so having to name [my experience] over and over and over and over and over again, it's just like being reminded constantly that the world doesn't get us.

In a separate comment, Kai added, *sometimes I feel like a broken record because I've said that a few times, like, let me point your attention to this once again.*

Like Kai, other participants have experienced this kind of (dis)orientation related to existing in cisheteropatriarchal spaces. For example, Forest asks how she can *exist as a queer person, a trans person, in the very rigid cis-het-dominated counseling sphere. It feels like all roads come back to, yeah, capitalism sure sucks, doesn't it?* Lavender shares that they *feel like I have to continue justifying myself.* Participants also shared specific incidents where they were reminded that they do not "fit" into their world. Speaking specifically about the assigned reading in xir classes, Liesel found *the number of binary things discouraging.* Xe also reported:

As a non-binary person, I am very frequently frustrated, especially with textbooks and research articles and how binary everything is. We're excluding so many people in the way that the literature we teach people with is written. That's an issue I frequently bring up in classes. Did you notice how binary this reading was? Wasn't that great?

Cat shared that *a lot of literature that comes up in my classes is very binary.* They also talked about how even in their multicultural/diverse populations course, *we had maybe one article on*

disability and maybe two articles on gender. Forest shared that she had just finished her multicultural counseling class before the group interview.

This whole section in class, like a PowerPoint, was on counseling implications with multiple identities. And just as they were about to start counseling with LGBTQ+ individuals, we ran out of time. And it was never revisited or returned to at all. As a trans counselor, I was just like, these people likely haven't read the readings for the course, this could have been their one opportunity to learn more about counseling people in the queer community, and it was completely untouched.

In addition, participants noticed a lack of inclusion in their program context, five (Forest, Kai, Violet, Lavender, Cat) of the seven participants shared that they have had difficulties with faculty or other CITs using incorrect pronouns. These experiences seem to serve to (dis)orient participants frequently to their queerness. Violet shared about an experience in their pre-practicum class where they *struggled so much with being misgendered in that environment while I was trying to fucking learn that I left class with panic attacks two or three times.* This was despite the fact that they had corrected their peers many times. Violet shared that their peers would tell them that:

It's just so difficult to do [use they/them pronouns] because of what you look like or how you dress. And, like, that fucking sucks because I do experience a ton of fluidity, especially in how I want to dress and present, because I combine things on the opposite ends of the spectrum, and it changes from day to day. I was just confusing for them. And they were defending their misgendering. They were defending it!

Lavender shared that their experience with sharing their pronouns is often met with questions, like *why didn't you correct me for using the wrong pronoun? What does this actually mean? Can you explain what these things mean?* They go on to share how *having to do that multiple times*

for the same people makes me feel like I have to continue justifying myself. Lavender also shared a situation related to pronouns.

I was talking about how I felt continuously misgendered by the people in the group, and I distinctly remember [the professor] asking, "Why didn't you say something?" And it felt defensive on his part, and it felt like I was doing something wrong. There is already so much of a burden on me. And I feel the weight of the system of power and oppression on me. I don't feel like I'm the one who should have to continue to check in or prove myself and make space for myself. I wish they would do more to recognize the crippling weight of just existing in this world, walking through this world with these marginalized identities, and how beneficial it would be to have some of this weight lifted off and shared.

Cat also shared that some faculty just choose not to use they/them for me. I still have professors, like, dead name me in emails and assignments, which is kinda rough. Forest shared that faculty members use the wrong pronouns for me continually. And I have to gauge, how much do I want to engage with that. Being that we're on different levels of the inorganic academic, hierarchical model, like I am a student, and you are a person who has direct control over whether I graduate or not.

The problem with pronouns highlights how trans and GNC CITs are especially experiencing (dis)orientation as well as causing (dis)orientation in others. These participants are often objects of curiosity, questions, and, at times, open hostility. For example, Violet also shared about a time they were confronted by a classmate who

Thought they had offended me in some way; they had used the wrong pronoun for me multiple times that night, and they pulled me aside after class, and they wanted to have a conversation about what they said. And they pretty much told me they don't get it, and

they don't understand it. They've never been around anyone like me and have all these positive intentions to understand me and also explain yourself. And they were also defending their mispronouncing and defending their religious stance on trans and LGBTQ people in general.

However, participants were not only focused on the (dis)orientation caused by their gender identities. Many participants spoke about how this (dis)orientation also highlighted their intersecting privileges.

Space Two – (Re)orientation: Recognizing Privilege

The (dis)orientation discussed in the previous space creates tension with space two. Participants are often marginalized by their programs, but their (dis)orientation also led to a (re)orienting toward recognizing and accepting their privilege and creating supportive communities with others who (dis)orient white cisheteropatriarchy. Therefore, participants also recognized there is a hierarchy of privilege within the queer community. Kai stated that, *for the most part, I find the pronoun thing a lot less exhausting than my non-binary siblings do. And you know, I recognize that.* Violet and Emily also discuss how being able to pass as cisgender was a privilege they had.

Violet shared that *I have the privilege to pass as a cis female. I can hide in plain sight. I can turn off this identity expression, not really, but I can change my expression which will change how people perceive me.* They shared how they used this to protect themselves in unsafe situations. Violet shared that *I went to the state Counseling Association Conference, and not a pronoun to be seen anywhere. Literally, they just didn't do it. So, I didn't do it. And I just like, shut the fuck up for three days.* In this situation, they felt it safer to hide their identity than disclose it by asking people to use their pronouns. Violet recognizes how this is a privilege

because *someone of a racial or ethnic minority, sometimes or most of the time, can't hide in plain sight to protect themselves and blend in.* They also shared that although they recognize this as a privilege, it also comes with the cost of *not feeling congruent or genuine or authentic.*

Emily shared:

I've never been flat-out asked if I was trans or anything like that. I think a lot of that is in I do go to a school where it's, it's pretty rural, and so I feel like a lot of people just don't even have that on their radar.

She also discussed how passing is itself a complex idea that brings mixed emotions.

In multicultural class, we did a day on counseling people who are gender nonconforming, transgender, nonbinary. And I shared a little bit about my experience in that class. And there was a student who sat next to me who said, "I had no clue that you were trans!" Okay, first of all, really? And second of all, I know what you're trying to say, and I think I appreciate it, but also, what is that supposed to mean? I feel like there's this expectation when you tell a person they don't look trans. It's supposed to be like, "oh my god, thank you so much!" You know, like, thank you for saying I'm imitating the other gender well enough. I think in her mind she was probably showing me that she's an ally. It's well-intentioned but comes across as a little sloppy.

Kai discussed how:

Once you come out with an othered identity, it feels safer for others to either talk about their own [identities] or about people they love. And I really valued that, you know, it feels like a privilege to get to be a person that people feel safe to talk to about that.

Lavender and Violet discussed how doctoral students of color in their programs connected with them over shared experiences of marginalization at their institutions. Violet shared how a

doctoral student of color supported them during the pre-practicum class, where they struggled with being misgendered.

He understood to some extent and was talking about the racism he's experienced within this program. I hadn't seen my identity in the same way or on the same playing field as that. And I still don't.

Lavender shared:

That's something that I have definitely experienced, having gone through the gender journey of leaving behind a more privileged identity. I have thought multiple times, 'I think that this is a microaggression that I'm experiencing. I think I'm feeling this,' but it doesn't feel like I deserve to feel this.

Both expressed discomfort with the assumption that their experiences were similar to those of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC). They both identified that being white meant that they didn't have as much claim to the term oppression as People of Color.

Having queer faculty and supervisors was another privilege that came to light during the interviews. Emily shared that she has a supervisor who is a queer Person of Color. She says *she's not trans, but I think she understands marginalization in a predominately white rural area. And she has been really helpful with walking that path.* Emily also shared that she specifically chose her programs because of the presence of queer faculty members. During the interview process for entering the program, *I noticed they all had their pronouns on Zoom.* And that the queer faculty were *open and affirming, which made the process of coming out much easier.* Forest shared with Emily that she was a little jealous, stating *that's so lucky that you have someone in your program who has some semblance of shared identity because there are two other gender nonconforming people [in the program] that I know of among the cis-hets.* Liesel shared that one

reason he chose his program was that *several of our faculty do research specifically working with LGBTQIA2S+ people.*

Participants experienced (dis)orientation/(re)orientation by existing in the binaried spaces of their programs. However, participants also (dis)oriented and (re)oriented their programs due to their actions. This threshold is explored in the next section.

Threshold Two – Action and It's Cost

In this section, participants explored how their (dis)orientations and privileges catalyzed them to action. Participants were far from passive observers of the (dis/re)orientation they experienced. Those experiences moved them to action. This threshold explores the intersections of participants' (dis/re)orientation, their actions towards liberation, and the theory of Guenther's (2021) fifth sense of critique as problematization. The first space recognizes how participants are empowered by their actions to create a better world for themselves, for trans and GNC clients, and the queer community in general through the problematization of things that were taken for granted in their programs. "Problematization is the practice of articulating and questioning assumptions" (Guenther, 2021, p. 15). The second space explores the tension created by this kind of self-advocacy work and how participants create meaning and choose action in the face of continued oppression.

Space three – Problematization through Action

For all participants, their (dis/re)orientation led to actions to increase awareness of and decrease the influence of white cisheteropatriarchy. Violet's story from the last section, in which they experienced panic attacks in their pre-practicum class related to misgendering, didn't end there. Violet shared that they had reported what had happened to a professor, who gave them

multiple options for handling the incident. Violet chose to have the professor come to their class and speak with their classmates.

I chose to make it public. She [the professor] was just like, "This is unacceptable. I get it. You're all students and learning, and it may be new for some of you to use alternative pronouns, but that's too bad. You need to do better." She also said she would be happy to provide them with education resources, but they need to get their shit together. And then she was like, "Do you want to say anything?" And I was like, "Yeah, I'd love to." I pretty much just said, "This is already a difficult environment for all of us. We're all struggling in pre-practicum. And it's literally more difficult for me. It's this added stuff on top of skills, and I'm anxious to walk in here every day. I don't care if you don't understand. You can use a pronoun, and you can be respectful." And they took it, they changed, at least when someone was watching.

Violet also spoke about the impact on themselves for speaking up and getting a professor involved. They reported they felt supported by their program faculty because even outside this incident:

They had set their foot down in classes and corrected others on my behalf. And it's been effective. And they [people who had used the wrong pronouns] learned that I had some level of power. It gave me a lot of confidence. And I felt really, really supported. If I didn't feel supported by these doc students and professors, I would have left my program within a month.

Most participants reported asking questions during class, pointing out whose voices were missing from class readings and texts, and calling attention to areas where things could be more inclusive. Liesel shared with a mischievous grin that xe has a partner in action in the program. *If someone tries to binary myself or my other classmate, I will then purposely make sure I am*

heavily only using they/them pronouns with other classmates for the next 20 minutes. Xe calls this xir passive-aggressive-breaking-the-binary mode. If you're uncomfortable with being non-binariied, good, you can grow.

All participants shared that they also advocated outside their programs. Both Emily and Lavender shared how they advocated for changes at their internship sites. Emily shared that she noticed that emails going out to clients were auto-populating with clients' legal names.

I had to come in and ask if this system takes into account the preferred name or if it only takes into account the legal name. [My supervisor] was able to look at it, and it automatically populated the legal name. So, we were able to remove that and get that fixed.

Similarly, Lavender shared that *at my internship, I was the person who started introducing ourselves with pronouns and adding pronouns to our website and nameplates.* Forest also shared that she attempted to get changes put into place, but *my center uses positively ancient software. So, there is a space for "affirmed name." But it still shows someone's dead name. So, I feel like I just need to remove it or cover it up whenever my trans clients come in. Also, I think the gender options are male, female, and other, so it's very limiting. There is no self-report for pronouns or identities, things of that nature. So it's, as I imagine, with many centers, in dire need of an update to bring it into the current year.*

Although no changes have been made yet, Forest has been able to advocate for these changes to be implemented as soon as the software can be updated.

Additionally, actions are not limited to advocacy for the queer community. Forest, Leisel, and Cat all identify as having disabilities. All three pointed to the importance of disrupting ableism in counseling as well. Liesel states:

Outside of the rehabilitation specialty, disabilities are only mentioned once in the CACREP standards. And that one mention is you need to make sure that you have an ADA statement in your syllabus. It feels like we're missing the point.

Cat shared:

I'm disabled, too. And I also want to talk about that and why aren't we bringing this up in class more. So, when we step into a space, just opening that up, and it's like not just academic spaces, but the counseling space, that's been something that I've had to bring up repeatedly and has also been met with discomfort, or resistance.

Importantly, participants found profound meaning in the actions they took. Kai states:

Ultimately, I feel like to the degree that more cis people feel comfortable and not freaked out by trans-ness, the better the world is going to be for me and my kids. And all the little baby transes.

Lavender shared:

But it's not just about cultural competence for our clients. It's also for my well-being like, if I am with coworkers who are not aware of these things for themselves, that's going to have an impact on me, which is going to have an impact on my clients.

Forest discusses how she views the actions she has taken. Saying *advocacy and education are things that I'm really passionate about like, we need allies outside of the queer community. So, providing resources, understanding, and connections for our community is really something important to me.* However, participants shared that though they find meaning in their actions, they can also become exhausted by the continual burden of action.

Space Four – Power and Problematizing: The Cost of Continued Action

The actions discussed in the previous section turned out to be a double-edged sword for participants. Bringing Guenther's (2021) fourth sense - analysis of power - in this threshold

shows how participants experience exhaustion from the extra mental load required by problematizing as a continued action. Violet shared that even though they felt empowered by their actions in the above story,

It also made me feel somewhat guilty for my peers because they did change their behavior. And I know logically that their guilt or whatever their feeling towards me is their decision. But losing people you talk to always sucks. It was clear that their thinking was that if they don't say anything to me, then there's nothing I can report. Almost a year and a half later, some of them are still doing the super cautious thing.

Violet also shared how advocacy can be positive or negative for them.

I think advocacy feels great when something actually comes from it, and there are positive outcomes, like within my program. But I've engaged in some moderately extensive political advocacy at the state level. They have a bunch of anti-trans bills, one of which was recently passed. And that weighs upon me more heavily when I have written something or called someone and done these, like traditional advocacy steps, and it feels like no one's listening. I would also feel guilty if I had not taken those steps, but it was still passed. So it's a very solid lose-lose. So, for the bigger systems, advocacy feels very disheartening. And [the bill] affects me more directly. I don't always like engaging in advocacy because I'm faced with how shitty the state I live in is head-on. And even if I write a wonderful letter stating the code of ethics, and this and that, and cultural competencies and personal experience, it feels like it's not going anywhere. So it's like, what's the point?

And because they knew the cost of action, they made a calculated decision about which internship site to go to.

It's just another piece of the puzzle we have to consider. How is this going to be for me with my identities? That played a major role in choosing my internship site, even though others had better perks, such as paid for trainings or actually being paid. But instead, I chose one that would feel accepting and supportive.

Lavender shared they are proud their internship site is now displaying the pronouns of the staff, but also that:

It's fucking bonkers to me that it wasn't commonplace before I came here. And that I had to do this as the non-cis person. That's gross. And whenever we have a meeting, when we're introducing ourselves, I end up being the first person to use pronouns, and then the people after me remember to do that. There's that pressure and the exhaustion of constantly having to do that, just to be myself, and it's mingled with the happiness and the affirmation, I guess, of being able to advocate for myself and others.

Emily discussed how she views being a resource as positive and negative. She says:

On the one hand, people will look to me if there's a question that someone has about an LGBT client, but that doesn't feel like too much. That just feels like, okay, well, I have an experience that they don't have. On the other hand, there have been times when a professor will email me and be like, "Hey, there's this task force that's going on. Would you like to join?" Or "Would you like to join this workspace and meet once a month? It's unpaid, and you'll need to drive 30 minutes to get there." And two years ago, when I first started, I would have been like, yes, please! And now I'm like, I would love to do some of these things, but I can't do all of them. And at some point, you know, cis-het people are just going to have to learn that they can be affirming without having to have someone hold their hand through it. And that's the annoying part, I guess, getting asked to be

added to these task forces and these brainstorming groups and all these other things and not getting paid for any of it.

She also discussed how most of the others on the committees were faculty who were being paid for their time. And that these are the people who are asking her to participate. She pointed out that these faculty members hold positions of power over her in the academic setting. She shared another situation:

The counseling center where I work, we were interviewed by a local news source about diversity efforts on campus. And I was asked to be one of the people interviewed and asked about my experiences, basically sing the praises of this Counseling Center. I do think that they are really good. And I think that they are one of the most affirming sites there. But it was interesting because I noticed that they did not ask anybody with a non-marginalized identity to participate. And so it was just like, "Okay, let's steer together the minorities and have a show. Look how cool we are!" And I don't know if that was their intention, but that's how it looked.

Forest shared her experience of being in situations where queer issues come up.

[I get] kind of like side-eyed and heads turning gently towards me waiting for what I've got to say, and afterwards people will check in with me like for follow up. Like, can you speak to your experience and provide input?

Forest continued sharing how she copes with this added mental and emotional load. She shares that these encounters have given her a *really good felt sense of if someone is genuinely trying to get closer to me or just trying to mine my expertise*. And she's used this sense to make decisions about

how much I can, you know, assist the allies and the cis-hets and how much I can just let go. I've had to recognize that I'm an unpaid intern. They're getting free labor off me. I'm

going to do what I can, take what I need, and leave the rest. I've learned I don't need to share my whole life story or cross any emotional or physical boundaries if I don't want to. I have the ability to set my own boundaries and recognize, like, hey, this is not a moment where I need to educate or talk about my experience or, like, write out my memoir. I'm just gonna say no, like, no is a complete sentence.

Emily shared that how others approach her makes a difference in the amount of work the interactions take.

[If someone asks] "How do I do micro affirmations in the counseling relationship? Or how do I understand the nuances of the queer and trans community?" If you're coming in, and your understanding is at a baseline level of asking your client basically, like, "What made you trans?" You need to do your own research. You need to at least get a baseline understanding of what it means to be trans, what it means to be queer. And then, for the more nuanced topics, we can get into that. But yeah, if you're starting at Ground Zero, you should be doing your own work first.

Kai and Liesel shared how being part of a marginalized community, experiencing microaggressions (or other discrimination), and being seen as a resource for interacting with other members of their communities requires them to see their work in different philosophical ways. Liesel described how xe uses learning theory to live with the burden of being a resource. Xe knows that xe may need to share something 3 to 15 times *for it to stick with a person. It's that dialectic of recognizing the frustration of "the burden of explanation."* *That's why we need advocacy from people who are not in these communities.* Kai describes this dialectic as, *on the one hand, don't fucking tone police me. On the other hand, if I'm constantly yelling at you, I'm gonna alienate you. And that's not an effective way to coalition build. And we need advocates.*

Kai also shared how she sees people who are afraid to ask questions or interact with her because they fear messing up or offending her. Kai says:

One thing that I find myself saying to a lot of people is: my heart knows what goodwill feels like. I can tell the difference between when you're trying to learn something new and when it's hard for you. And when you're just trying to tell me that my experience is wrong and you shouldn't have to accommodate it.

Forest and Emily brought up how their program approaches coping with difficulty. They joked about how they are often told to remember self-care. Forest states

There's so much talk in the program about self-care. We kind of laugh whenever [faculty] refer to it, like, "decorate your office" or "do fun things for yourself." It's like, with what money? With what time? I'm just curious. It would really help if these internships were paid. That would really help with self-care.

Emily agreed with this, saying she has little time to dedicate to self-care.

Yeah, self-care is not on the map. I mean, it's something that I acknowledged that I should be doing. I think a lot of my professors have good intentions, but maybe it's been a while since they were in a master's program. And yeah, like with a GA, an internship, my job outside of those two things, and classes, I'm looking at 60ish hours a week.

The balance of managing the tension of problematizing also created (dis/re)orientations in participants' work with clients. Threshold three discusses this in detail.

Threshold Three – (Dis/re)orientation with clients: Self-disclosure

Threshold three brings the (dis/re)orientation cycle to participants' work with clients. This threshold brings together the (dis)orientation, political climate, and state friendliness towards trans and GNC folx, as well as their chosen theories. In this threshold, participants pointed to the decision-making process about self-disclosure of gender identity with clients. Self-disclosure is

the intentional verbalization of personal information by a therapist to a client (Farber, 2006; Hill & Knox, 2001; Peterson, 2002; Roes, 2004). All participants had completed their practicums and spent time working directly with clients. Many of the participants shared how they struggled to decide when, if, or how to disclose their gender identity to clients.

Space Five – (Dis/re)orientation with clients: Self-disclosure

Self-disclosure was an issue that was brought up often during the interviews. Most participants discussed how they made decisions about when to come out to clients. Forest shared that she

operates from a person-centered approach. So, whatever is most authentic, congruent, helpful, and empathic, for me, has been the modus operandi. In the first session, I'll just share my name and pronouns. And if the client has a shared identity we've commiserated over the current state of state legislature. And where we are as queer people, both in the [local] campus community and federally. I think about self-disclosure as a dynamic process. Some [counselors] essentially never self-disclose, but I'm not nearly as rigid. I'm just going to be myself. And that's usually how I operate.

Forest also shared *I love being in college mental health counseling because when I say "Hey, I'm Forest, I use she/they/it pronouns," they're like, "okay," and we just continue. The times are changing, which is good to see.*

On the flip side, Leisel shared that xe spent most of xir time as a therapist, not disclosing xir gender identity. Xe shared that this was *because I didn't feel like it was safe to be out where I was working before.* Xe went on to share that during that time:

I helped several clients through their transition process. [I work from] an existentialist [framework], so I believe in self-disclosure a little bit differently than a lot of other theories do. So, it felt like I was not necessarily creating the most genuine connection I

could have with my clients. Existentialism is, of course, a humanistic branch where genuineness is really important. And so, it's like, I am not actually being my true self with you. But I'm being enough of myself. The part that felt disingenuous was knowing this is a part of myself that we're just not going to talk about. This is especially true when you're helping people who aren't on one of the ends of the gender [spectrum] because I understand that experience deeper, but I wasn't sharing that. They still benefited from my understanding. And I definitely got a lot of comments like, "You are too cool to be cis-het," and I was like, "thank you."

Leisel contrasted this with xir current job where xe is open about xir gender identity.

I've had more client questions about the entire LGBTQI2S+ spectrum since that's something I disclose. And that's something I'm happy about because it means that people are coming and being like, "I feel safe to be able to ask these questions." When previously before people maybe thought "You're cis-het. You're maybe not a safe person". And so, I think having that representation has made it safer for some people to ask questions.

Leisel wasn't the only one who struggled to feel genuine with clients with not disclosing. Violet shared that, like Emily, they decide based on each client. And that

having to make a decision about disclosing my gender identity every time that I meet with a new client or go to a supervisor is like all of this arithmetic that feels added and more burdensome, in addition to the very rigorous intrapersonal work that we have to do as counselors. The way that I conceptualize people is really informed by relational cultural theory and feminist theory. So, taking into account cultural identities is very important to the way that I understand people. So, having to do that arithmetic in my head, especially in the state that I live in. Am I going to be safe being myself?

Violet shared how they have continued to think about what it might take to feel congruent and genuine as a counselor.

I know that I want to be able to be congruent as a counselor. I want to come out at some point, or at least be out to some of my clients. And if that means just having a rainbow sticker here and there, and they think I'm an ally, at least that's something. I don't know where that goalpost is of being visible enough. Does that mean I tell every single client my pronouns? I would lose clients I currently have if I did that, and I know that. And that's a rough part to consider when we're thinking about getting hours and that I can do good work with this person. I have been doing good work with this person. But it's missing that part of the interpersonal connection. It doesn't feel like I'm being fully in the room. So I can do most of the work, still, but it is just such a cost to pay. There are definitely people that I have chosen intentionally not to tell. And, like, it's always hard for me to tell, is that my own bias? Is that my own fear? How do I make that decision? I don't know.

Violet went on to share that counseling is *harder when you've made the decision to not be genuine in a session. If I'm not [disclosing], then there's guilt that I'm not being genuine enough.*

Lavender shared they tried to seek advice on self-disclosure from their supervisors and colleagues. They stated:

When I came into my new phase of my gender identity and pronoun usage, I had an idea as part of my informed consent when I'm first meeting a client to introduce a couple of my cultural identities that may have an effect on the counseling relationship, as well as modeling what identities are for my clients who don't know what that means. I brought this idea to my group supervision and got tons of support. And I felt confident and comfortable doing that because it affects the counseling relationship. Then I brought that

idea to my [site] supervisor, and he completely shut it down. He said it was too much about me and not enough about the client. His perspective is that culture shouldn't be broached unless the client brings it in themselves. My supervisor, having the identities that he has as cisgender, white straight man, couldn't understand why it was important to me.

Lavender stated the impact of living in an unsupportive state on their professional identity. *The way I conceptualize counseling, congruence is a necessary ingredient if we are to help other people achieve that same state of congruence. And having to take [personal] safety into consideration to do that fucking sucks.* Lavender shared that despite having mixed messages from supervisors and living in a conservative state, *I started wearing a pronoun tag. I introduced my pronouns at the beginning of every intake session.* Lavender also shared an experience with a client where they were open about their identities in a way that led to an open discussion with a client.

I did intake with a client who identified as a black cisgender man. And in part of the intake I was broaching cultural identities that were important to him. And he talked about how he can pass as white very easily, and that he wouldn't have brought in his racial identity except that I identified myself using my pronouns at the beginning. He said that he thought I might understand some of his experience of having a marginalized identity. So, that was an immediate connection with him in a way that I would not have been able to do as a cisgender male counselor.

Not all participants felt this level of cognitive dissonance around self-disclosure. Emily shared she doesn't necessarily struggle with feeling disingenuous with clients and is out with only some of her clients. She states:

I primarily operate from feminist and relational cultural theory. And self-disclosure is pretty big there. With that being said, it's big as long as it contributes to rapport building or does something for the client. So, it very much depends on a vibe check on whether I disclose or if I sort of keep that in the back of my mind. So, with other trans and queer clients, I will disclose if I feel like it's appropriate. I have a lot of clients who, and this is a trans person stereotyping here, I have a lot of clients who are very Christian, highly, highly Southern Baptist. And a lot of people who are athletes or do Greek life, and it's a process of feeling them out. If I do disclose, is this going to rupture the relationship? Is this going to be an uncomfortable situation for me? And so, I think it's just kind of getting a vibe check of what the room feels like before disclosing.

Cat shared they are out to their clients but because they also do therapy in Spanish, they have run into a unique issue using gender-neutral pronouns with Spanish-speaking clients.

Gender-neutral pronouns are kind of challenging because they require changing most, if not all of the words, in a person's everyday language. When I speak to clients in Spanish, I don't ask them to use gender-neutral pronouns. I let them pick a pronoun for me. And I'm okay with whatever feels the most comfortable for them. I'm just very inflexible about my name. So, as long as they get the name, right, I'm cool.

Conclusion

In this section, the findings of the study were discussed. Three thresholds and five spaces were identified. Threshold one focused on gender (dis)orientation where two spaces were created. Space one was a space where participants felt out of place in their program. Space two identified a space where participants' differences helped them recognize their privilege. Threshold two focused on action and the cost of the action. Space three was where participants

were moved to action by their (dis)orientation. In space four, participants recognized the cost and burden of continued action. Finally, threshold three focused on self-disclosure. Space five showed how participants made decisions about self-disclosing their identities with clients. The next and final chapter will discuss how these findings addressed the research questions, the implications for counselor education programs, the limitations, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Chapter four gave an in-depth exploration of the shared lived experiences of trans and GNC CITs. This chapter discusses how these findings answer the study's two research questions: 1) What do the lived experiences of trans and GNC CITs in graduate counselor education programs reveal about the presence of systemic cisheteropatriarchy in counselor education programs and counseling as a profession? 2) How are trans and GNC CITs reimagining the counseling profession? The findings are also placed within the context of the current literature on trans and GNC CITs presented in chapter two. Finally, the implications of the findings, recommendations for future research directions, and limitations are explored.

Exposing Cisheteropatriarchy

Academic Settings

For participants, their experiences in classrooms and at their universities point to how trans and GNC folx (dis)orient (Ahmed, 2006) and transgress (Janssen, 2017) cisheteropatriarchy. Janssen (2017) discusses how trans and GNC folx are in a continuous cycle of (dis/re)orientation of the norms of the gender binary. Wherein the power structures of white cisheteropatriarchy are enacted *on* trans folx and enacted *on by* trans folx. Although we still have a long way to go, one can see that gender binary norms have loosened over time. Janssen (2017) and Feinberg (1999) point to trans and GNC folx as the leaders in this gender revolution. They are subject to the pressures of this system but also constantly pushing back on it.

This cycle is clearly present in the lives of the participants. Participants shared how their gender identity impacted all areas of their academic lives, including university and classroom settings, supervisors on and off campus, and clients. Participants were continually (dis)oriented by the expectations of the gender binary and were reoriented to knowledge and action. All

participants discussed the actions they took to problematize the cisheteropatriarchy in an attempt to create more inclusivity in counselor education programs and the counseling profession for themselves, trans and GNC clients, and the queer community. Participants shared how this cycle was both empowering and exhausting. They also shared how their labor was often expected or invisible, which has led to being overwhelmed and exhausted.

Other studies have come to similar findings about the experiences of queer CITs or college students. Bryan (2018) reported that LGBT CITs regularly experienced microaggressions in the CEPs. Like the participants in this study, Bryan's (2018) participants were often misgendered and felt misunderstood or seen as outsiders. Bryan (2018) also found that participants were frustrated with the lack of focus on queer issues. Participants in this study pointed to the lack of diversity in classroom topics as a leading source of frustration. Forest shared how in her multicultural class, they ran out of time to discuss working with queer clients, and the topic was never revisited.

In their study on trans undergraduate students, Pryor (2015) found that classrooms were seen as places that perpetuated white cisheteropatriarchy. The participants in this study also saw the classroom as a primary arena for problematization. All participants shared that they regularly pointed out how trans and GNC folx were left out of the literature they read for class. Like Pryor's (2015) participants, Cat often got misgendered and deadnamed in class because their university would not allow them to replace their legal name on official paperwork, email addresses, or class rosters.

Both Pryor (2015) and Bryan (2018) found that trans and GNC students, like the participants of this study, felt pressure to correct, inform, or educate professors and fellow students during classroom discussions. Participants in this study reported feeling responsible for educating others because they did not want misinformed counselors to harm trans and GNC

clients with their ignorance. Linder et al. (2019) found that their participants expressed a lack of choice when educating others. The participants in this study seemed to find empowerment in deciding when and how to share. For example, Forest shared that she makes calculated decisions about when she shares her experiences and how much she shares. She also shared that she recognizes academia as a capitalist system that will attempt to get as much free labor out of her as possible, which is why she feels comfortable with saying no whenever possible. Other participants shared similar calculations.

All participants shared strategies they used to protect themselves from the mining of their labor. There seemed to be a cycle in which participants took action to problematize white cisheteropatriarchal norms, thus illuminating the gaps in knowledge and oppressions present in their CE programs. Participants made themselves visible through action, but visibility was not always positive. At times, visibility meant they were looked to as experts on all queer issues or approached by faculty to join diversity initiatives or be on committees. Emily, for example, shared how she has been approached about joining committees, and while she would have been happy to do so, she was never compensated for her time. This lack of compensation meant that she had to learn to set strict boundaries and refrain from doing free work that she was passionate about in order to avoid being overworked and experiencing burnout.

Additionally, participants expressed frustration that others with privileged identities often seemed to feel entitled to their knowledge. There seemed to be a power dynamic wherein those with more privileged identities leaned on participants to share knowledge without educating themselves. Emily expressed frustration with those who expected handholding. Forest shared that she's been able to hone a sense of people's intentions, whether that be genuine interest in getting to know her or using her expertise. It seems the cycle of (dis/re)orientation requires a lot of participants. Participants shared how other CITs who identified as trans or GNC were a

tremendous support and provided a safe place to vent and feel heard. Others shared how having queer faculty could also be helpful. Violet and Lavender shared how having allies, other CITs, and faculty who could share the burden of action (in correcting mispronouncing or misgendering specifically) served to help them continue their work.

Participants shared their thoughts on what makes a true ally. Lavender shared how another CIT asking, “How can I support you?” after an incident of misgendering was a validation of their frustration. Violet shared how their professor stepping into their class to help other CITs recognize their unacceptable behavior gave her a sense of empowerment. Kai shared that she wants people to feel comfortable around her and knows she can distinguish between a mistake and an intentional action. Emily shared how some people attempt to be allies by being shocked when they find out she’s trans or calling her “brave.” Forest also shared that she finds the phrase “you’re so brave” exhausting. They both view these types of interactions as disingenuous and more about the other person flexing their allyship rather than doing the work of true allyship. None of the participants identified themselves as brave or as doing something brave. For participants, living out their gender identities and taking action to problematize white cisheteropatriarchy was a matter of survival. Like Gess and Horn (2018), participants in this study called for heterosexual, cisgender faculty and CITs to join in the work and share the burden of advocacy for trans and GNC folx. The participants seemed desperate for others to understand their situation and take up the burden of advocacy. Unfortunately, university settings are not the only place where students are exposed to the presence of cisheteropatriarchy. Many problems also surface in experiences with supervisors and work with clients.

Working with Clients

The (dis)/(re)orient cycle/pattern also appeared at participants' internship and practicum sites and shared overlapping topics with perspectives on supervision. Shipman and Martin (2017)

identified self-disclosure of gender identity as a primary concern for trans and GNC CITs. They discuss how reactions to therapist self-disclosure could be impacted by the therapist's place in the sociocultural hierarchy. And point to special considerations when working with trans-identified youth and the importance of therapists not disclosing something to their minor clients that they did not disclose to the parents. While this did not come up in discussions with participants, what did come up was how some participants felt like they had very little guidance in making decisions about self-disclosure. This is an example of how self-disclosure could become unethical, especially if the client's parents are not affirming. In this situation, a trans or GNC counselor could put their minor client in a situation where they conceal information about their therapist from their parents. However, this may not be something a new counselor considers when working with minors. Shipman and Martin (2017) point out how this kind of self-disclosure could positively impact parents because seeing an example of a successful trans or GNC professional could help alleviate some of their fears about their child's future.

Another potential problem with self-disclosure identified by Shipman and Martin (2017) is choosing when not to disclose gender identity to a client. In this case, it is essential to consider the likelihood of the counselor being accidentally "outed" to a client. Factors such as the size of the community they work in or their presence on social media are essential factors to consider. Additionally, if this were to occur, the potential impact on the therapeutic alliance could result in clients losing trust or being hurt by their therapist's lack of openness. No participants brought up this possibility or discussed the potential harm that could occur in this situation. This could be because all but one participant (Emily) reported having no trans or GNC faculty in their programs. Additionally, Blumer and Barbachano (2008) point out that there are no guidelines regarding self-disclosure of gender identity.

Lavender shared a story about how disclosing their gender identity at the start of a therapeutic relationship with a client led to the client sharing more information about his own racial identity. The client told Lavender that he shared more openly because he thought Lavender would be more likely to understand him since they also have a marginalized identity. Leisel also shared how being open about xir gender identity has made clients feel more comfortable discussing their gender more openly.

Other experiences related to working with clients were not brought up in the current literature. For example, Violet shared how they chose an internship site that was known to be supportive of queer folx so that they knew they could be more comfortable there. This was despite knowing that other sites offered paid positions. Violet shared that they had to choose between their financial and mental health when choosing their internship. Leisel and Forest shared how they enjoy working with college students because they seem less phased by using gender-neutral pronouns or hearing that their counselors are trans or GNC.

Participants also shared how they took action at their sites to make them more affirming for queer clients. Forest and Emily shared how they spoke with the director at their sites about the software deadnaming their trans and GNC clients. Emily shared how she successfully got automatic emails and charts to show the client's name rather than their legal or dead name. Forest shared that her attempt was less successful because the software used was outdated and did not have that capability. However, the director is now aware of the problem and will take this into consideration when the software is updated. Lavender shared that they were able to get counselor pronouns added to counselor nameplates and website bios at their site. They shared that they felt proud of the changes they implemented. All participants who were able to implement changes at their sites talked about how they felt they were advocating for clients but that it was frustrating that these changes had not already been made.

Finally, participants in this study discussed how anti-trans legislation impacted their ability to conduct counseling. Violet shared how, during their time in internship, their state passed a law banning gender-affirming care for minors. They shared that their trans and GNC clients wanted to talk about and share their fear and grief about this news. Violet shared how their fear and grief were compounded because they struggled not to over-identify with their clients or process their own emotions. Given that there are several clinical issues outside of self-disclosure that are not addressed in the current literature, it is no wonder that supervisors lack knowledge of how to guide trans and GNC CITs.

Supervisor/Supervisee Relationships

Current literature reports that trans and GNC CITs face similar microaggressions and prejudice in supervision that they face in university settings (Blumer & Barbachano, 2008; Bryan, 2018; Carroll & Gilroy, 2002; Chan et al., 2018; Cor et al., 2018; Shipman & Martin, 2017; Singh & Chun, 2010). In addition, supervisors may lack knowledge of the unique needs of trans and GNC CITs. Shipman and Martin (2017) and Coolhart (2005) point to the importance of considering the client's sociocultural location when discussing self-disclosure. This is especially true regarding client's experiences with their gender. Supervisors may not understand that trans and GNC counselors and CITs may have unique experiences and understandings of gender that will benefit their clients.

Lavender shared how their site supervisor opposed their idea to disclose their gender identity as part of their informed consent despite receiving support from their group supervision class and university supervisor. Lavender shared how they felt this was because their supervisor was a white, cisgender, heterosexual man who lacked understanding of the importance of discussing cultural identities. In fact, Lavender shared that they were told that cultural identities should not be broached unless brought up by the client, even though research on broaching is a

well-researched topic that says the opposite is true (Day-Vines et al., 2007; Fuertes et al., 2002; King, 2022; King & Borders, 2019; Knox et al., 2003; Zhang & Burkard, 2008; Zhang & McCoy, 2009).

King and Borders (2019) define broaching as “actively addressing culture and power in session” (p. 341). Research shows that openly broaching these topics in counseling positively impacts the therapeutic relationship, client retention, and client satisfaction (Day-Vines et al., 2007; Fuertes et al., 2002; King, 2022; King & Borders, 2019; Knox et al., 2003; Zhang & Burkard, 2008; Zhang & McCoy, 2009). The supervisor's lack of knowledge meant Lavender was prevented from disclosing in a way that felt comfortable and best for them and their clients, which could potentially harm the therapeutic relationships. Despite this, Lavender eventually chose to include self-disclosure of their gender identity and pronouns as part of their intake sessions.

Additionally, participants struggled to identify what they needed from their supervisors. Violet shared that they struggled to make decisions about self-disclosure. Their supervisors were willing to listen when they brought up the topic, but few of them could offer guidance on making this decision. Violet and Lavender discussed how they felt disingenuous with clients when they chose to withhold this part of their identity and feared that it would impede therapeutic progress. Shipman and Martin (2017) and Blumer and Barbachano (2008) do not discuss the impact of withholding gender identity on trans and GNC counselors. However, they do discuss how the therapeutic alliance can be impacted by disclosure. Shipman and Martin (2017) discuss four factors that can impact a trans or GNC counselor’s decision to self-disclose. 1) The counselor's comfortability with their gender identity, 2) where the counselor is in their transition process, 3) counselor privilege or ability to be perceived as cisgender, and 4) counselor safety. Participants in this study all reported comfort with their gender identity and no participants shared that they

transitioned while seeing clients. However, participants cited the importance of safety and their ability to be perceived as cisgender as reasons they chose not to disclose. Emily shared that she has never been asked directly if she is trans. Violet also shared that they can present as cisgender when safety is a factor or when they perceive a client might not be affirming. Leisel shared xe did not disclose to anyone, client or employer, xir gender identity at xir previous place of employment because xe did not believe xe would be safe to do so.

Other participants shared how they have largely made decisions around self-disclosure on their own. The exception to this was Emily, who reported that her supervisor is a Black lesbian ciswoman who has had much to share with her about self-disclosure. Emily seemed confident and comfortable with her decisions about when and how to self-disclose. While other participants shared ambivalence about choosing not to disclose, Emily shared that she was comfortable. This is likely because she received more support and direction from her supervisor regarding this issue.

Forest, Kai, and Cat, all participants who live in more liberal states, did not seem to struggle as much with questions about self-disclosure. Forest shared that she discloses her pronouns to all her clients and has not had any negative pushback. Cat discussed how speaking in Spanish has made using gender-neutral pronouns harder because gender-neutral Spanish is more difficult for clients to speak. They did not report guidance from their supervisors but shared that they allow their clients to choose which pronouns they use when addressing them.

Almost all participants expressed the wish to have supervisors or faculty who were trans, GNC, or at least queer. Many expressed that they often do not know what to ask or what they need to know because they are new to counseling. The burden of considering all the implications of their decisions is onerous because of their lack of experience in the field. However, given the

dearth of information, the likelihood of having a knowledgeable supervisor is low. The importance of this is evident. So, what does this mean for counselor education?

Implications for CE Programs

The (dis/re)orientation cycle experienced by trans and GNC CITs gives them a unique perspective on CE and counseling as a profession. Throughout the study, participants shared ways in which they are reimagining or hoping to impact the field of counseling. Participants readily identified how their own privileges had been made clear to them, even while living with other minoritized identities. All participants shared how this impacted their view of counseling and the importance of incorporating issues of identity and power into their work with clients.

Participants specifically named theories they use when working with clients: relational cultural theory, feminist theory, and existential theory. All participants viewed sociocultural identities as an essential component of the therapeutic relationship. Participants shared that they were deeply troubled by the lack of guidance from their supervisors and faculty when making these decisions about when and how to self-disclose gender identity. All participants had experience with disclosing and not disclosing. Participants desired to live and work openly without fear for their safety, especially those who live in states actively legislating away their right to exist. Violet shared their disappointment at attending their state counseling conference and finding no mentions of gender identity or pronouns. This signaled to Violet that they were not safe to be open about who they were in this space.

Through their conversations, participants spoke about how they reimagined CE and the counseling profession and how they actively worked to bring it about. Participants showed dedication to advocating for themselves, their peers, and current and future clients. They did this by sharing their experiences in classes, speaking up about inclusivity in readings and resources, and pointing out ways to make their internship sites more affirming. Participant advocacy was

not limited to trans and GNC clients but to anyone with a marginalized identity. Participants continued their advocacy despite personal and professional setbacks and the impact on their mental health.

Participants worked to educate fellow CITs, faculty, and staff, hoping their efforts would help make the world a more affirming place. Participants actively worked to view others in a positive light despite negative experiences. Despite often feeling overwhelmed by the political attacks on the rights of trans and GNC folx, they remained dedicated to pushing back against cisheteropatriarchal. However, participants were also clear about their need for help and support from counselor educators, professional counselors, and CITs who do not identify as trans or GNC because they know their vision of a more inclusive, equitable, and affirming world is not possible without it.

The implications for CE programs are clear: we need to do more to support trans and GNC CITs at every stage of their development as counselors. However, our support and advocacy cannot be limited to the programs. Gender identity impacts every facet of life. Therefore, our advocacy must be conducted on every level. Queer stories, authors, case studies, and articles that include diverse representations of gender must be woven throughout programs to ensure that CITs can work with queer clients. Additionally, openly discussing self-disclosure of gender identity in counseling, as well as the potential ethical dilemmas of those choices, must be brought up by professors and supervisors, as CITs may not have thought through this prior to meeting with clients. Trans and GNC CITs need to be prepared for the potential issues with self-disclosure before they arise.

Moreover, monitoring the interaction between CITs to make sure that all students are acting ethically towards each other, despite their personal views on gender identity, is paramount to supporting trans and GNC students. Trans and GNC CITs must have the support of faculty

and administration to be able to use their correct name on their work and have their correct name visible to professors prior to the start of class. Professors can include their pronouns in their introductions and in their syllabi to normalize the practice and help trans and GNC CITs feel comfortable in the classroom and supervisory spaces. However, these changes will only be superficial if faculty and supervisors do not prioritize their learning and effectively model acceptance of trans and GNC CITs.

Furthermore, when considering asking trans and GNC CITs to participate in diversity initiatives or other university committees, CE programs must also consider compensating them for their time. Participants in this study shared that they wanted to help but that their time and resources were limited. Many expressed feeling like they were being taken advantage of by their programs. This problem could be curbed by resources allocated to students who provide expertise to further program and university diversity initiatives.

Counselor education programs must also be aware of internship sites' level of support towards trans and GNC folx. While trans and GNC CITs should never be prohibited from working at any site, it would be beneficial for them to understand what they are walking into. Relationships should be formed with these CITs in mind, especially if CE programs lack gender diversity in their faculty. Trans and GNC CITs would likely benefit from the guidance of a trans or GNC supervisor or even a queer supervisor. CE programs should actively invest in relationships with queer affirmative spaces, not just for trans and GNC CITs, but so all CITs have the experience of working with this ever-growing population.

Finally, changes cannot be limited to the classroom and university levels. Active involvement in creating more inclusive counseling associations and conferences is also essential. Supporting the right of trans and GNC folx to live as their affirmed gender is essential. As we see from the participants in this study, the political climate harms their mental health as well as

the mental health of queer clients. As CE professionals, we do not have the luxury of “not being political” when our students and their clients are being negatively impacted. The rights of trans and GNC folx are one of the most critical civil rights issues of our time, and we need more people to join the fight against their oppression.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study is unique in that it focuses only on the experiences of trans and GNC CITs and, therefore, is exploratory. Much more research is needed to truly understand the unique lived experiences of trans and GNC CITs. Entire studies could be devoted just to the experiences of trans and GNC CITs with clients, in academic settings, and with supervisors. Quantitative research would give CE programs an idea of the numbers of trans and GNC folx applying and attending CE programs. It would help us understand the scope necessary to address the gaps in knowledge for faculty, supervisors, and programs.

Additionally, studying the lived experiences of trans and GNC folx who are already practicing counseling would likely yield a wealth of knowledge for trans and GNC CITs. Who would know better what the needs of trans and GNC CITs are than those who are already practicing? How do they make decisions around self-disclosure to clients? What ethical considerations do they consider? What did they learn or not learn in their CE programs that was/would be helpful?

Furthermore, some topics were brought up but not discussed in enough depth to be included in this study’s findings. For example, two participants transitioned from the gender they were assigned at birth to GNC during their time as graduate students. Both shared how the use of reflexive practices in the classes and exposure to systemic power and oppression helped them see themselves and their gender more clearly. Other participants came into their programs already

having gone through their transition, but the stories of their gender identity journeys were profoundly moving and impacted their decisions to become counselors.

Finally, further exploration of how other historically marginalized identities may interact with gender identity is needed to create unique lived experiences. As was briefly discussed in chapter four, many of the participants also identified as disabled, which was another area they were (dis/re)orienting and problematizing in their academic careers. Many participants worried about how their unique, visible, and invisible intersecting identities would impact their ability to secure employment after graduation. Participants shared that they did not receive adequate support from their universities in navigating potential prejudice or identifying employers that would not just hire them but also be queer and trans-affirming. Given the large gap in research related to trans and GNC CITs and counselors, one could hardly find a topic that would not provide insight into their experiences. I hope this dissertation will inspire others to take up the cause and continue the work started on these pages.

Limitations

The limitations of this study include the low number of participants, lack of diversity, potential researcher bias, and studying trans and GNC CITs together. As the researcher, I included every participant who passed the screening survey and responded to my initial email. Despite having only seven participants, I believe the group interviews provided rich data, but because of the low numbers, several demographics were left out. For example, no transmen were included in the study. Additionally, most participants were identified as white, with one identifying as Jewish, one as Latinx, and one choosing not to disclose. Thus, the primary perspective in the study was one of people who are white or are primarily perceived as white.

Additionally, although I utilized reflective journaling, member checks, and practiced cultural humility, no one can completely rid themselves of bias. Therefore, despite disclosing my

sociocultural and theoretical positioning in chapter three, there are likely biases that I am not yet aware of and, therefore, unable to disclose or account for in my research.

Finally, although I make the point in these pages that sexual and affectional minorities and trans folx are often lumped together in research. During this study, it became clear that the experiences of those who transitioned within the binary experiences differed from those of GNC folx in the study. Therefore, it is possible that by studying them together, I lost some of the nuances of the lived experiences of both identities.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the findings of the present study about how trans and GNC CITs expose white cisheteropatriarchy in academic settings, their work with clients, and in the supervisor/supervisee relationship. The implications of these findings for the counseling profession were also discussed. Finally, recommendations for future research were provided, and the limitations of this study were discussed. I fervently hope this study will inspire others to conduct similar research.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INITIAL EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS

Hello!

I am so happy that you are interested in participating in my study. As a fellow graduate student, I know your time is limited and valuable. Therefore, I will do my very best to be efficient and respectful of your time. First, I want to acknowledge that I am asking you to share what may be deeply personal stories. To help you feel more comfortable with me I'd like to share a little about myself. I am in the process of finishing up my Ph.D. in counseling and counselor education. I have been working towards this goal for the past 4 years. Before moving to Texas to pursue my Ph.D., I lived in Indiana and worked as a counselor for about 8 years. I have worked in various settings with adults, children, families, and couples, including many queer people. I identify as a cis-female and a lesbian. I'm also white, neurodivergent, and disabled. I'm currently single and have two children, ages 10 and 13. My children identify as trans, my oldest as "genderfluid," and my youngest as "gender-bendy." I consider myself an advocate for queer and trans folx, especially within the counseling profession, and living in Texas with trans children has been an experience. My main goal for this study is to hear from counselors-in-training (like you!) who can speak to how to make counselor education more socially just for all. A big goal, I know, but we have to start somewhere. I approach all my work as a counselor, educator, and researcher as a collaborative process. I hope you will feel comfortable sharing your thoughts, ideas, and questions with me.

This study has several steps that I am hoping to get through in the next 4-8 weeks. The steps of the study will be as follows:

1. Screening
 - a. You've already completed this step! Yay!
2. Background survey
 - a. The background survey is expected to take no more than 20 minutes, but the time will vary depending on how detailed your responses are. (As far as I'm concerned, the more detail, the better!). This survey is meant to help me as I prepare for the group interviews. As well as give you an idea of the topics and questions I intend to cover. The information collected in these surveys may be quoted or referred to in the group interview, but you will not be identified. For example, I might mention that several survey responses discussed the issues of gendered bathrooms on campus, but I won't name who those people were.
3. Informed Consent
 - a. After signing the informed consent document, you officially become a participant! You can choose to schedule a 10-15 minute Zoom or phone meeting with me to quickly or complete the process via email. Either way, I run through the highlights of the document, answer any questions you have, and get your physical or verbal agreement to participate in the study.
4. Group interviews
 - a. This is the fun part! You will meet (via Zoom) a group of other counseling students who also identify as trans (or gender non-conforming). I will ask questions and you'll have time to discuss your experiences together. You will

have multiple opportunities to suggest topics or propose questions (I want your input!). Groups will have 3-5 participants. After you complete the background survey I will be sending out two options for group interview times, you will only attend one. You must attend a group interview in order to be considered a participant in the survey.

5. Analysis

- a. This step is all me! After both groups have done their interviews, I will disappear for 2-3 weeks while I conduct my qualitative analysis of the data (i.e. the interviews). I will be looking for patterns and themes among the experiences of each of the participants as well as analyzing the data as a whole.

6. Final group interview/Analysis feedback

- a. After I emerge from my analysis coma, I will schedule a final group interview. This final interview is completely optional and will serve two purposes. 1) We will use the time to answer any lingering questions submitted by participants or that I have after analysis. 2) I'll present the findings of the study (the themes and patterns that emerged from the analysis). I'll then open it up for comments, corrections, thoughts, questions. I'm considering my participants as experts on their experiences, so your feedback will be vital to me.

Important note: Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study anytime. However, please note that once the group interviews have been conducted, your statements as part of the group interview will be included in the final write-up of the study.

Your next step: If you have any questions about me or the study, please reach out! I will do what I can to help you decide if participation in this study is right for you. If you feel comfortable moving forward, please follow the link below (when you have time) to the background survey.

Background Survey: https://tcu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9FWOBbSfOFgynBA

Again, please do not hesitate to reach out to me with questions, comments, or concerns about this project.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

- Pre-interview protocol
 - Introduce self, thank you for being willing to participate.
 - Go over the consent form and have participant confirm their consent verbally, record on the form, and begin interview.
 - We'll start the interview with a couple of basic demographic questions, then I will ask you about your experiences in your counseling program. What questions do you have for me before we get started? (Pause for questions.) Are you ready for me to start the video recording? **Reminder:** You are able to ask me to pause the recording or decline to answer any questions. If at any point you feel uncomfortable or distressed we can pause the interview or stop it. If we stop the

interview you can reschedule or choose to end your participation in the study.
Let's begin.(Start the recording)

- Demographic Questions
 - What are your preferred pronouns?
 - How do you identify in terms of gender identity?
 - How do you identify in terms of sexual orientation?
 - What is your cultural/ethnic identity?
- Lived Experience Questions
 - Tell me about yourself and how you came to be in a counseling program.
 - How long have you identified as trans?
 - Who knows about your identity?
 - What other identities are important to you?
 - What has it been like to navigate through your program with this identity?
 - Tell me about your experiences as a student in the classroom environment.
 - What challenges have you faced as a trans person in your program?
 - How have you felt supported in your program by your institution, faculty or peers?
 - How have you felt supported by peers?
 - When have you felt unsafe in the classroom environment?
 - What happened?
 - How did you feel?
 - How did you cope?
 - How did you advocate for yourself?
 - Has your program ever addressed any issues related to being a trans counselor?
 - Tell me more.
 - Tell me about your experience as a counselor in supervision and your practicum or internship site. (If applicable)
 - What challenges have you faced as a trans person in supervision and practicum/internship?
 - Have you had any experiences at your internship site (with supervisors or clients) that you believe are unique to you or related to your trans identity?
 - What happened?
 - How did you feeling?
 - How did you cope?
 - Did you address the issue with your supervisor? How did they help?
 - Have you ever felt unsafe at your internship site?
 - Did you address this issue with your program supervisor?
 - If yes, how did your supervisor handle the issue?
 - Are you out at your internship site or with your site supervisor?
 - What else would you like me to know about your experiences in your counseling program?

APPENDIX C: INDEX CARDS

