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Transgender College Students in the English Composition Classroom in the Rocky Mountains

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TRANSGENDER COLLEGE STUDENTS IN THE ENGLISH COMPOSITION
CLASSROOM IN THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS

by

Tracey L. Williams

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School,
the College of Education and Human Sciences
and the School of Education
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

Transgender students face challenging and unique experiences in academic classrooms on college campuses. This qualitative study, which used queer and transgender theory, sought to examine the realities of transgender students' experiences within the English Composition classroom in the Rocky Mountains. English Composition is a class nearly every undergraduate student must take, no matter their major. It acts as a microcosm of the college population. Composition classes are generally small (20-25 students), offering a more intimate setting than other general education classes in college. Additionally, personal writing is expected, as is sharing work with classmates for peer-review sessions. Within this context and this setting, I gained valuable information about the experiences of transgender students within this academic setting. Currently, little research on this student population exists within the geographical locale of the Rocky Mountains. Findings of this study can be used for other disciplines within the classroom setting and help to educate administrators and other staff members working directly with transgender students. Information from this study can help colleges and university instructors serve the transgender college population more appropriately.

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CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

The transgender community is visible in ways it has not been before due to significant cultural changes taking place over the past few years. Strides have taken place in both popular and mainstream culture. For example, *Time Magazine* published “The Transgender Tipping Point” (Steinmetz, 2014) as their cover story featuring Emmy-nominated transgender actress and advocate, Laverne Cox, who stars in the Golden Globe winning Netflix series, *Orange is the New Black*. The top-earning CEO of 2014 was Martine Rothblatt, a 59 year-old MTF (male-to-female) transgender woman who now runs a company she founded called United Therapeutics, but made her fortune founding Sirius radio (Newman, 2014). The acclaimed streaming drama *TRANSPARENT*, a 2015 Golden Globe Award-winning show starring respected character actor, Jeffery Tambor, chronicles a man in his seventies transitioning to a woman (Poniewozik, 2014). And Bruce Jenner, gold medalist in the 1976 Olympics, made a splash on the cover of *Vanity Fair* magazine with his “Call me Caitlyn” cover story, re-introducing the world to her new female identity, after transitioning from male to female (Bussinger, 2015). These are some of the pop cultural events that have put transgender people in the forefront like never before.

In 2015 alone, two transgender young people had reality television shows documenting their lives: *I am Jazz* and *The Keswanis: A Most Modern Family*, and gay marriage was made legal in the United States (Chappell, 2015). Transgender scholar Jennifer Finney Boylan (2015), wrote an article for *People Magazine* on Bruce Jenner’s public transition into Caitlyn, echoing GLAAD’s Sarah Kate Ellis, saying that everyone in America now knows someone who is transgender.

Background

Transgender college students face a multitude of challenges on college campuses. The most problematic issue is ignorance by others of what it means to be a part of this community. Transgender college students share the same excitement and anxiety as other college students; they go to college to get an education, to socialize, and to grow as people, but the environment of college campuses as heteronormative (Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005), both inside and outside of the classroom, is pervasive. Heteronormativity is a hierarchical social construction, where the assumption is everyone is heterosexual (genderandeducation, 2011). This type of assumptive thinking leaves transgender students at worst, alienated, and at best, marginalized.

Transgender is a term used to describe a wide array of facets of sexuality and gender identity within the sexuality continuum. The most succinct definition of someone whom is transgender is that the biological sex to which they were born is not the gender with which they identify. Included under the vast umbrella of people who are transgender are people who may identify as genderqueer or transsexual; some call themselves a person of transgender experience (GLAAD, 2013). Often, transgender individuals are grouped together under the LGBT or LGBTQ moniker, yet they are not the same. Being lesbian, gay, or bi-sexual is a sexuality, whereas transgender is a gender identity (Renn, 2010). Additionally, being transgender is different for everyone. Some opt for gender-reassignment surgery; others do not. A transgender person could identify as male yet need a yearly pap smear, or a transgender individual identifying as female may one day require a prostate exam. Cisgender is when a person identifies as the biological sex they were assigned at birth (transstudent, 2019).

The precise demographic size of the transgender population in the United States is not readily available; however, there are several estimates. According to a recent study done by The Williams Institute (Flores, Herman, Gates & Brown, 2016), found that in the United States alone, nearly 0.6 % of adults identify as transgender, which is roughly 1.4 million people. Other estimates are closer to 9 to 11% of the population, which is similar in size to the population of California (Gates, 2011). The most recent estimate of the population of the United States is 322,762,018; if the reported statistics are true, that would mean an estimated transgender population of somewhere between 29,048,581 and 35,503,821 people who identify within this group (usnewsreports, 2016). It is difficult to gather accurate data on this population, particularly how many college students identify as trans, as there are multiple variations within the umbrella term transgender, and there are those who choose not to self-identify.

While many colleges and universities today, both public and private, have some form of LGBT organization or Straight-Gay Alliance on campus, research from 2005 (Beemyn et al.) suggests that the climate for transgender students is not welcoming. This was substantiated by a more recent survey completed by Campus Pride (Rankin, Blumenfeld, Weber & Frazer, 2010), which examined the campus climate vis-à-vis the experiences of LGBT college students. Not only did LGBT students experience microaggressions, in addition to overt hostility, transgender students felt unsafe, often times, hiding their gender identity, and many even considered leaving college altogether (Rankin et al., 2010). Additionally, suicide attempts by transgender people are estimated to be as high as 41%, most attempting more than once (Moskowitz, 2010).

Nearly every college student, regardless of major, must take English Composition. This is a writing-intensive course, where students are taught college-level composition skills, along with critical thinking, rhetorical analysis, and reading comprehension. These courses are designed to be discussion-based, whereby student participation is expected. English Composition students are graded on their participation in these discussions, as well as their involvement in peer-review sessions, where students exchange their essays with other students in the class to receive peer feedback. The assigned writing is often about personal subjects and discussion is based on these topics. Additionally, as these are writing-intensive classes, they are usually capped at 20-25 students, so these are smaller, more intimate class settings, as opposed to other first-year courses that are held in amphitheater-style rooms with hundreds of students. The type of class setting used in English Composition courses is often intimidating for transgender students because they must choose whether to reveal their personal circumstances and experiences or disguise their identity (Furrow, 2012).

Because these courses represent a cross-section of the student population, I think this translates well to the broader population. Examining students' experiences, particularly transgender student experiences in English Composition will assist educators in English departments and in other subject areas about how this student population experiences the academic aspects of college. Creating a phenomenological qualitative study using both queer theory and transgender theory allowed me access to transgender students in order to gather information that can assist both faculty and administrators in re-imagining or re-tooling how courses, English and others, are conceptualized and taught to assure an inclusive and non-intimidating environment for transgender students.

Furrow conducted a study in 2005, which was published in 2012, focusing specifically on LGBT students within the confines of college English Composition courses. The author's justification for locating the study in English Composition was that this was a required course for virtually all students on campus, as well as a course most often characterized by personal writing and discussion. During her study, Malinowitz (1995), who pioneered work on this subject, had one respondent who displayed inhibitions of writing about any experience that could be considered gay. This assignment can be particularly hard on transgender students when the work written for a grade would also be either read by classmates or read to the class. Compromise seems to be what many transgender students do when confronted with their writing in open-form classes and writing workshop (Furrow, 2012). Compromising who they are and avoiding any gay issues seems like the safer option for many transgender students.

Transgender students conveyed stories of normative male/female dynamics within the classroom (Furrow, 2012). An assumption of straightness (heteronormativity) was pervasive among both students and faculty. Transgender students also expressed fears of coming out to the class because they did not want to be the token transgender or possibly gay student if they chose to write truthfully about their lives. Additionally, they were concerned about biases, both conscious and unconscious when it came to their work being graded, and they were concerned about their ultimate success in the course if they made it known that they were gay, or identified within the transgender community (Furrow, 2012).

Furrow's (2012) research produced evidence of two normative assumptions in the English Composition classroom, assumptions that could also be carried into other classrooms. The foremost being that any student who does not self-identify or seem transgender is automatically assumed to be straight. This revealed itself in classroom conversations where the assumption was that all those speaking were assumed straight. Lincoln, who is transgender, noted that "Sexual orientation didn't come up, but sex did, in terms of creative processes, memories of visceral experiences. There was always the straight assumption in discussion" (Furrow, 2012, p. 151). A caveat to the assumed heteronormativity within the classroom was that this put transgender students into a position in which they had to assume the role of other, whether psychologically or socially (Furrow, 2012).

Problem Statement

While over the last decade there has been a substantial amount of research in the realm of both LGBT issues and transgender issues among students (Marine, 2017; Nicolazzo, 2016; Schmalz, 2015), not enough research examines the realities of the college classroom from the perspective of the LGBT student, or in this case, the transgender student. Additionally, little research was found that focused on the Rocky Mountains that specifically attends to LGBT and transgender issues. The region known as the Rocky Mountains or the Rocky Mountain states includes the following states in the United States: Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico. For the purposes of this study, Rocky Mountains refers to the state of Colorado, home of the Rocky Mountain National Park. Additionally, Colorado has a reputation for being progressive and forward-thinking. For example, while federally marijuana use is illegal, Colorado

passed Amendment 64 in 2012, allowing both medical and recreational use of cannabis (McCoppin, 2019). Additionally, Colorado elected the United States' first openly gay governor, Jared Polis, in 2018, as well as electing the first transgender legislator, Brianna Titone (Garcia, 2018). Focusing this study on Colorado sought to determine if college students in one of the Rocky Mountain states were as forward-thinking toward transgender students.

Currently, much of the research that does exist recurs around two similar themes: incorporating either queer theory into a course (Malinowitz, 1995), or introducing gay experiences and gay-themed literature into a college classroom (Abbott, 2009; Alexander, 2008; Alexander & Wallace, 2009). Several studies have considered how to eradicate homophobia from campuses (Iconis, 2010; Longerbeam, Inkelas, Johnson, & Lee, 2007; Rivers, 2015), and there have been studies in which heteronormativity is examined as a normative atmosphere on campuses (Draughn, Elkins, & Roy, 2002; Fox, 2007, 2010). Furthermore, a few studies have inquired about LGBT lives, whether on-campus or off (Croteau & Talbot, 1999; Efrigg, Bieschke, & Locke, 2011; Fanucce & Taub, 2010; Zubernis & Snyder, 2007), but not specifically considering academics. The only study that looks specifically at LGBT experiences within a classroom is the study conducted by Furrow in 2005 and published in 2012, which is now over a decade old.

Instructors, in English Composition courses and in other disciplines, face challenges in creating a classroom environment in which transgender students feel included and visible. Since 2005, no subsequent studies using this student population (LGBT) in English Compositions courses were able to be located. No research has been focused only on transgender student experiences in the English Composition classroom.

Due to significant cultural changes, such as on-going public discourse about gay marriage and equal rights for members within the transgender community, the atmosphere within English Composition courses should be re-examined. This is particularly significant as same-sex marriage was deemed constitutional by the Supreme Court, (de Vogue & Diamond, 2015), which many in the LGBT community deem as a step toward acceptance of transgender people. Additionally, the Rocky Mountains lack representation in the literature for research on LGBT and/or transgender college students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to re-examine the climate within the English Composition classroom for transgender students as a follow-up to the study by Furrow (2012). Attitudes have seemingly shifted, in popular culture, at least, and the transgender community has a more visible platform now than at any other time in history. This, coupled with the on-going national and international debates on same-sex marriage and LGBT civil rights begs an update of Furrow's study. Few studies have been found that focused on this population specifically within the Rocky Mountain region.

Every college student must take English Composition, regardless of their major. This presents a broad spectrum of student populations within a small classroom environment, usually capped at 20-25 students. The nature of the course, which is writing intensive often relies heavily on writing of a personal nature, along with robust class discussions and supplemental readings. A unique environment, due to the above-mentioned dynamics, creates a dilemma for transgender students and for teachers of English Composition courses. Transgender students risk being either marginalized or ostracized if they choose to write honestly about their lives and/or if they choose to

identify as part of the transgender community (Furrow, 2012). Teachers risk being complicit in the marginalization and alienation of this student population, depending on how they conduct their classrooms, how they compose their syllabus, and how they handle inappropriate remarks about transgender students and/or other LGBT issues made in their classes. The only study that exists which examines LGBT students in the composition classroom is nearly 15 years old and does not focus solely on transgender students (Furrow, 2012). This study needs to be updated, along with adding a focus shift to the Rocky Mountains, where students lack adequate representation in the literature.

Conceptual Framework

In this study, I used queer theory as a conceptual framework. Queer theory, at its core, is the rejection of fixed identities, specifically, gender-specific identities, like man or woman or male or female (Jagose, 1996). The argument rests on the idea that such a broad label cannot possibly be enough in which to sort people and make assumptions about what a man or woman would like, for example, or how they should act, what they should look like, and/or whom they should love. Diamond wrote in *Sexual Fluidity: Understanding Women's Love and Desire* (2009) that the spectrum of people's love, desire, and behavior is far too broad to be reduced to one gender, or two genders, and this can be said for all people. She argues that all of us have within us this continuum of sexual fluidity, some to more varying degrees than others.

A more specialized faction within the realm of queer theory is transgender theory. Transgender theory also rejects the gender binaries put forth by queer theorists, but takes it a step farther. The argument for transgender theory is that it is not queer, and it is not about gender; being transgender is a more complex and multi-faceted experience, so no

other theory would do justice to what transgender people experience; it is unique unto those whom identify. Stryker explains: “In the body I was born with, I had been invisible as the person I considered myself to be; I had been invisible as a queer while the form of my body made my desires look straight” (Stryker, 2006; 1994). The idea is that transgender is its own experience; transgender people may identify as straight or queer or gender-fluid. Because of this, there needs to be a theory with which to examine this experience.

As a way to frame or re-frame the study by Furrow (2012), transgender theory, with elements of queer theory is a good fit to explore the issues between sex and gender, along with the ingrained gender binaries and constructions to which we all must adapt. Transgender students would benefit from an examination in which their experiences could be valued in a specific way that is unique to them and their individual and unique existence.

Guiding Research Questions

Q1: How do transgender students describe their experiences in the English Composition classroom?

Q2: What, if any, influence does the presumed atmosphere of heteronormativity have on transgender students' experiences within the course?

Q3: How safe do transgender students feel about discussing their personal lives?

Assumptions

With the current visibility of transgender people, in addition to the on-going public discourse on gay marriage and equal rights for members within the LGBT community, the atmosphere within the English Composition classroom has also changed.

This findings of this study can be used to further educate those professionals working within the confines of a college classroom to the realities of the experiences of transgender students within this environment. While this study is confined to an English Composition classroom, the findings could be relevant to other disciplines in other educational settings.

Delimitations

For this study, I limited participants to college students currently enrolled in an English Composition course or college students who have completed an English Composition course within the last 2 years. Age was not a factor. Students who self-identified as transgender participated. Additionally, the study was limited to students who either currently attend or have recently attended college in the Rocky Mountains.

Limitations

Limitations to this study are how straightforward and honest the research participants felt they could be. Since this is a qualitative study in which participants were interviewed by me, I must assume that participants' answers were factual. Participants were invited to participate on a voluntary basis, the intent is that the participants wanted to be as honest and forthright as possible, as I was not looking to make judgments but merely to tell the participants' stories.

Definitions

Definitions are provided to assist in uniformity and understanding of certain terminology and wording used within this study. All definitions are from the author if not cited.

Transgender/trans: This is an umbrella term which at its most basic understanding is a person's biological sex/anatomy does not match up with the person's internal/mental/perceived identity (GLAAD, 2016).

LGBT: An acronym used "as shorthand to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people; other common umbrella terms include GLBT, LGBTQ (adding queer) or LGBTQQ (adding questioning)" (GLAAD, 2016). Additionally, LGBTQQI (adding intersex) and **LGBTQQIA** (adding ally). For the purposes of this study, where nearly all of the research I found refers to LGBT, that is the terminology I will use, even though in popular culture, more people are starting to use LGBTQ. (GLAAD, 2016).

Cisgender: a person "who identifies as the sex they were assigned at birth." It has nothing to do with sexual identity (Transstudent.com, 2019).

FTM: Female-to-male. A person who was born biologically female, or assigned female at birth but now identifies as male.

MTF: Male-to-female. Someone who was born with male genitals; therefore, assigned male at birth but identifies as female.

Gender: Refers to an individual's sexual identity (GLAAD, 2016).

Sex: Refers to the biological characteristics of an individual (GLAAD, 2016).

Homonegativity: A negative bias many members of the LGBT community experience due to their sexual identity.

Heteronormative/heteronormativity: The presumption that all people are straight, unless otherwise notified.

GLAAD: formerly known as the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation is a group which monitors portrayals of LGBTQ+ persons in the news, media, and the arts, championing positive portrayals and eviscerating negative ones.

Justification

Much of the research about transgender college students is conflicting. While research from a 2002 study posits college campuses are commonly viewed as safe environments for transgender students (Draughn, Elkins, & Roy, 2002), a study conducted a few years before concluded that this is far from the reality transgender students face. According to Connelly, (1999) campuses are not welcoming to transgender and gay or bi-sexual students. While Herek (1988) found a hostile climate in the late eighties, with nearly 92% of gays and lesbians experiencing targeted harassments on campus, a more recent study (Rankin, 2003) showed that 36% of transgender students experienced harassment within the past year, and the majority of this harassment (89%) came in the form of derogatory remarks with 79% coming from other students. This study also found that nearly 20% of transgender students feared for their physical safety, and nearly half (43%) claimed their campus was homophobic. The situation remains relatively unchanged today. Goodrich (2012) explains that many LGBT students have uncomfortable experiences in high school, and usually, these experiences continue in college, and many times amplify and become more intense, even hostile. One of the biggest complaints of transgender students is the normative heterosexism on campus. The age group deemed millennials (born between 1981-1997) are found to be the most accepting when it comes to LGBT rights, including transgender rights (mtvinsights, 2014). Yet, a study conducted by Goodrich (2012) contradicted these findings.

It was clear in the study conducted by Furrow which was conducted in 2005, although it was not published until 2012, that transgender students in higher education face challenges, particularly in writing classes such as English Composition. No subsequent studies have been conducted since 2005, and due to significant cultural changes in the past few years, the transgender community is now visible in a way it has not been before.

Transgender college students, as a research population, are in need of more research focused on their experiences. While there are some excellent studies published, and assumedly more is being done as the visibility of transgender people increases, this population lacks appropriate representation in scholarly research. Because it was difficult to find many statistics, particularly with regards to college-aged transgender students, there are gaps in this research subject. This could be due to lack of interest, as it constitutes a small population. Or, this could be that many transgender students simply drop out of college. If the college atmosphere becomes too unwelcoming, this is the decision that many make (James et al., 2016). Researchers need to continue to examine this population and offer adjustments that colleges and universities can make to accommodate this valuable student population.

Summary

Chapter one provides an overview of the topic. The reasons why transgender college students need to be researched, particularly in the setting of the English Composition classroom were outlined. An overview of previous research, the research objectives, the theoretical framework of queer theory and transgender theory were discussed. Chapter two will provide a review of the literature.

CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study, using both queer theory and transgender theory was to examine the realities of transgender college students within an English Composition classroom in the Rocky Mountains. Transgender students face unique experiences on college campuses and in academic classrooms. This study examined transgender college students and ascertained their needs within a composition class. The composition classroom offers an intimate setting, as classes are usually capped at 20-25 students. Additionally, personal writing is encouraged and expected. Within this context and setting, I feel that I was able to gain valuable information on the accurate and authentic experiences of transgender college students. Using the geographical locale of the Rocky Mountains adds to the literature, as little research has been conducted in this region about this student population. The findings of this study can be translated to other disciplines campus-wide to serve the transgender college population more appropriately.

This literature review examined research on transgender college students. Several areas of study were examined that were relevant to this study. The chapter contains the following topics: (a) theoretical overview of queer theory and transgender theory, (b) historical overview of transgender in higher education research, (c) current research, (d) differentiating LGB from “T”, (e) homophobia and heteronormativity, (f) queering the classroom, (g) office of student affairs, (h) English Composition classroom, and (i) influence of the English Composition teacher. The chapter concludes with why this study is necessary and what this study will add to the current research.

Theoretical Overview: Queer Theory and Transgender Theory

Butler's seminal work, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) helped set the foundation for queer theory. Butler argued that gender roles are merely acts of performance that are not defined by biology, as both sex and gender are constructs. Vast in scope, queer theory examines and redefines gender norms within our society; this extends to sexual activity of any kind, in addition to any identities falling between the spectrum of normative and deviant (Henderson-Espinoza, 2015). The term "queer theory" was first coined by Teresa de Lauretis in 1990, during a conference organized by de Lauretis at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Subsequently, the term was included in "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities," a special issue she edited of *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Studies* 3 (1991).

A subset of queer theory is transgender theory. This was developed to discern the transgender experience from the rest of the LGBT moniker; it normally is grouped with "LGB" (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual). The aforementioned three are sexual orientations, whereas transgender is not. Being transgender, in its most succinct definition is when the body in which you are born does not match the brain (mind, emotions, inclinations) you experience; your biological gender does not match your intellectual gender. Sexual orientation is a whole other realm of complexities within the transgender experience. Therefore, using both queer theory and transgender theory within my research resulted in a more comprehensive yet nuanced study.

Transgender in Higher Education: An Overview

The first mention of the term “transgender” (formally referred to as transsexual) within academic literature came as a book review in 1979 (Coombs), for Stoller’s book, *Sex and Gender, Volume II: The Transsexual Experiment*. This book calls transsexualism a “syndrome” and blames family dynamics for “creating” this condition (p. 152). The first mention of academic research examining transgender college students also came as a book review (Poindexter, 2000) that assessed Sanlo’s book (1998), *Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender College Students: A Handbook for Faculty and Administrators*. Sanlo (1998) edited the book in which 48 academics wrote research-based essays on college students who identify as LGBT. Issues addressed within the book include LGBT students’ concerns within the classroom, such as never hearing their experiences discussed within a classroom, increasing an idea of invisibility among this group. Issues of safety and sympathetic environments were also addressed. Search results for “transgender college students” first appeared in the research when Beemyn (2003) examined how best to serve this student population. Her findings include the marginalization of transgender students by simple oversights such as having to identify as either male or female, thereby enforcing a gender binary. Additionally, Beemyn (2003) discusses the unique issues facing transgender students, who often get grouped within the LGBT moniker, although their needs and experiences are completely different. The search term “transgender in higher education” shows up in academic research databases in 2004, when Bleiberg conducted a study concerning mixed-sex housing policies on university campuses. Her study found that LGBT students are “extremely uncomfortable” when living with same sex roommates (Bleiberg, 2004, p. 4), and the call

for mixed-sex housing benefits this student population. Some campuses offer transgender students single room housing options, as well as private bathrooms, if requested (Bleiberg, 2004).

Current Research

Research addressing transgender college students seems to recur around similar themes. Several studies examined LGBT student lives, whether on-campus or off (Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005; Beemyn & Rankin, 2012; Goodrich, 2012; McKinney, 2005; Smirles, Wetherilt, Murphy, & Patterson, 2009), addressing issues such as campus safety, transgender health care, residence hall and restroom facilities, as well as general feelings by transgender students of isolation as college students. These studies give advice on how best to make transgender students more comfortable as college students, but these studies did not focus specifically on academics. Other studies examined heteronormativity, the assumption that everyone is straight unless otherwise informed, which seems to be a normative atmosphere on campuses causing stress to those who identify anywhere within the LGBT spectrum (Lovaas, Baroudi, & Collins, 2002; Sumara & Davis, 1999). Some studies considered how to eradicate homophobia from college campuses (Draughn, Elkins, & Roy, 2002; Iconis, 2010); the findings showed widespread homophobia over the past two decades, and that educating all faculty, staff, and administration about this topic would help to eradicate this campus climate of intolerance.

Many studies concerning transgender college students focused on areas within student affairs, like how to recruit and retain transgender students (Burlson, 2010; Cegler, 2012; Newhouse, 2013) and how best to make campuses more welcoming for

transgender students (Beemyn, Domingue, Pettitt, & Smith, 2005; Spade, 2011). Research conducted within the college classroom examined incorporating queer theory into a course or introducing gay culture and gay or queer literature into a college classroom (Abbot, 2009; Agid & Rand, 2011; Case, Stewart, & Tittsworth, 2009), to name a few. Other studies situated within the classroom examined student reactions to professors who are openly lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (Anderson & Kanner, 2011; Hart, Parmeter, & Reti, 1988).

Over the last decade, there has been an increase in the amount of research focusing on both LGBT issues and transgender issues in higher education; however, little research examines college from the point-of-view of the LGBT student, or more specifically, the transgender student. Little research examines the experiences of transgender students in academic settings within the confines a college classroom. Additionally, writing intensive classes, such as English Composition put transgender students in unique and many times uncomfortable positions (Furrow, 2012).

LGB & "T" College Students

Gender binaries do not allow for the existence and lived experiences of transgender individuals, but those with queer identities also do not relate to the reality of transgender life. Identities of feminine and masculine also hinder an identity that can be both, often at the same time. While there are the binaries of FTM (female-to-male) and MTF (male-to-female), within the realm of this identity, being transgender involves a myriad of experiences (Heyes, 2003). Differences can be physical; for example, not every transgender person elects to have sex-reassignment surgery, and those who do have surgery, have different variations of surgery. Additionally, not all transgender

individuals are straight or gay once they transition. Heyes (2003) argues that many in the transgender community reject the terms FTM and MTF and viewed these as an oversimplification of what it means to be transgender. It is misleading theorizes Heyes (2003); there is not a transition to what would be deemed conventional male-hood and equally egregious is the assumption of a traditional definition of female-ness. Again, these are a set of binaries which do not apply.

Queer theorists and transgender theorists agree with the minority status, meaning LGBT are an under-represented population, but many disagree, wholeheartedly, even on the inclusion of the “T” in LGBT—saying that transgender is nothing like being a lesbian, being gay, or being bi-sexual (O’Driscoll, 1996). While transgender students are usually grouped together within the LGBT moniker, there is a significant difference between them. LGB (lesbian, gay, bisexual) refers to a sexual orientation, where transgender is a gender identity (Renn, 2010). Therefore, these groups of students have very different experiences. This type of lumping together is reductive in any research process and leads to overlooking of transgender issues and realities; Spade (2008) terms this “the LGBfakeT movement.” Transgender students have unique and distinct lived experiences, both on-campus and off. This includes transgender student experiences within the confines of a college classroom.

Much of the research on LGBT and transgender college students’ experiences seeks to explore what it is like to be transgender. For example, Pusch (2005) focused his study on how those around the transgender individual reacted to their transition, while McKinney (2005) considered transgender college student issues outside of the classroom. College climate was examined; investigations took place regarding whether resources

were in place for transgender students; both studies also examined interactions with faculty, administration, and the general student body, resulting in findings of campuses being hostile environments for transgender students (McKinney, 2005), and worse, colleges lacked both the resources and the knowledge to properly address transgender student issues and concerns.

Additionally, Rankin (2003, 2010) researched campus climate and safety issues for transgender students and students identifying within the realm of LGBT; while safety fears among LGBT students is better in 2010 than 2003, there is still much work to do. Connelly (1999) conducted a systematic overview of complexities facing LGBT students on college campuses, which addressed the wide array of differences between each of these groups, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender, and the variations within each of these groups. The study showed that each sub-group had different needs, but they were always grouped together as one monolith. Much of this study dealt with issues concerning student affairs and did not address academics. The University of Michigan (Frier et al., 2004) conducted a report, to address how issues have changed since the “Lavender Report”—“From Invisibility to Inclusion: Opening the Doors from Lesbians and Gay Men at the University of Michigan,” (1991) where one of the final recommendations were to include sexual orientation into the university bylaws. The updated report went beyond research conducted by Connelly (1999) to explore academic methods of incorporating LGBT issues and themes into syllabi and curricula. More recently, a few studies have come up with resources and tips for accommodating transgender students in a college environment (“Resources for GLBT Students” 2007;

Spade, 2011), including having safe spaces for these students and providing counseling services.

In 2009, Smirles, Wetherilt, Murphy, & Patterson conducted a study focused on gender-nonconformity and transgender issues of students. The research focused on lived experiences by people who identified as transgender. This study highlighted the fact that many cisgender people still are not sure what transgender really means, and that confusion and uncertainty is what usually leads to fear of transgender people and ultimately ostracizing and/or harassing behavior targeted at transgender individuals. Smirles et al. (2009) theorized that the topic of gender non-conformity and transgender should be brought up in educational settings well before students reach college age. The findings from their study led to a collaborative effort formed at Emmanuel College that integrated ways to best handle and circumvent issues transgender students may face. These included issues in classrooms, in curricula, and on-campus.

Homophobia/Heteronormativity

While universities consider themselves the epitome of diversity and tolerance, the research suggests otherwise. There seems to be a disconnect from the inclusion usually sought by institutions of higher education and the real-life experiences of students on campus, particularly when it comes to LGB students and transgender students. Homophobia is real, and it is pervasive on college campuses (Longerbeam, Inkelas, Johnson, & Lee, 2007; Rivers, 2015). Many students who identify as LGBT experience bullying and other forms of harassment, as well as a hostile campus environment (Iconis, 2010). A 2002 study examined perceived heterosexism on college campuses (Draughn, Elkins, & Roy). The study elucidated that most colleges and universities are

predominantly White and predominantly heterosexual in culture and appearance; therefore, this increases homophobic attitudes and heterosexism toward LGBT students.

An off-shoot of this study looked at safety concerns LGBT students may have navigating this type of environment. Fox (2007, 2010) engaged in two studies about heteronormativity on campuses. This research echoed the study by Draughn, Elkins, and Roy (2002), addressing safety concerns and how difficult this was to incorporate within the mostly White, mostly heterosexual environment. Also addressed were safe-spaces, which in theory are a good idea, but they seem to fail in practice in this environment. Safe spaces or safe zones can be a room or designated area, or it can refer to a campus climate, where LGBT students and others can feel safe. When these spaces exist in higher education, counseling is usually available, as well as other services and resources to positively influence the LGBT community which it serves (gayalliance.org).

Another study subscribes to this idea of colleges being places of diversity and tolerance as mythical (Iconis, 2010). Iconis (2010) found that intolerance marred college campuses according to LGBT students' experiences. This goes against what is supposed to be a hallmark of most universities, diversity and respect for diversity. Iconis (2010) showed that there is a lot more to be done for members of the LGBT community to feel welcome and included on a college campus. An earlier study by Herek (1988) sought to go beyond this idea and challenge the use of the word homophobia, which he argues is an inherently biased term. Preferred is the term "sexual prejudice," which is deemed less pejorative. Herek (1988) wants to change the conversation and the wordage used by eliminating the misused term of homophobia, the fear of homosexuals, to the more appropriate sexual prejudice, where it is a prejudice, an unfavorable opinion not based on

reason, like racial prejudices. This study examined the attitudes of males and females towards homosexual men. It also looked at the idea of sexual fluidity, where sexuality cannot be confined to binaries of straight and gay. Herek (1988) argued that perhaps changing the language will help to facilitate changes in perception and later, reality.

Queering the Classroom

One theme written about is how best to incorporate LGBT representation, issues, and experiences into a college classroom. While this is concerned with the classroom, it does not feature transgender students' experiences, as part of the study. Many times, this occurs within the confines of literature and composition courses. Pioneering this approach, Malinowitz (1995), chose to make a composition course queer-themed, where homosexuality was the dominant perspective, and heterosexuality was deemed the other. Advocating for a queer-centric course, she sought to both educate non-LGBT students, and to normalize the experiences of LGBT students, all within the same classroom.

Abbott (2009) researched the best ways to integrate transgender issues into a course, using transgender literature at a business college. In this research, Abbott included transgender-themed films, like *Paris is Burning* and *Boys Don't Cry*. Like Malinowitz, the ideas behind integrating transgender issues into the course was to normalize people who identify as transgender, thereby, educating students so there will be less ignorance when it comes to this community. Students were fully able to either reject or embrace the ideas, issues, and experiences the course addressed. Similarly, Alexander (2008), used a composition course to teach sexual literacy. This included introducing students to queer theory, as well as the presumed construct of heterosexuality

and consequences of that binary gender construction, where sex and gender are put into two distinct and opposite categories: male/masculine and female/feminine.

Alexander and Gibson (2004) created a composition class where the primary text was Dorothy Alison's memoir, *Bastard Out of Carolina*. In the book, Alison, a lesbian, explores her childhood in poor, White, rural South Carolina with a brutal honesty that connects to readers. Alexander and Gibson found that their students also connected to the book and to Alison's story; they also connected to Alison as a person; this was the goal, to have students embrace a writer, who also happens to be a lesbian. While this is certainly bringing LGBT representation into the composition classroom, the research does not look at the point-of-view of LGBT students within the class, the focus is on introducing non-LGBT students to Alison and her life story and lived experiences.

Alexander and Wallace (2009) conducted similar studies.

Marinara, Alexander, Banks, & Blackmon (2009) examined the textbook or First-Year Reader in a composition course, looking at gender binaries, and specifically, the absence of queer representation. This study determined that the absence of an entire group, LGBT, is worse than minimal representation. Hudson (2014) also examined composition textbooks and cautioned WPAs (Writing Program Administrators) and teachers of composition to use texts which included LGBTQ representations but to make sure the representations showed this community in a realistic and positive light, as opposed to perpetuating stereotypes.

Barrios (2004) used the assumed anonymity of students in an online class format to gauge students' reactions to queer identities, queer literature, and/or queer writing. The researcher theorized that the student's online persona would act as a tool of honesty,

so students would feel more apt to share their true feelings. Findings showed students felt an increased sense of freedom to express their true selves, as they were able to be more anonymous through the online format of the course. This course also acted as an exploration of students' feelings and thoughts on queerness as a subject and a sexual identity. Students were not asked to identify as LGBT. Similarly, Peters and Swenson (2004) used an online classroom to define and diffuse issues LGBT students may encounter.

Similar to Barrios's study (2004), LGBT students were not asked to self-identify, but writing exercises were provided to stimulate online discussions as it pertained to LGBT issues and/or concerns; this included perceptions of LGBT lives by non-LGBT students. Like Barrios (2004), this study found that an online format could assist students in navigating sometimes uncomfortable issues and conversations utilizing the imagined safety of a student's online persona. Case, Stewart, and Tittsworth (2009) sought to eliminate sexual bias in a psychology course, making sure that all sexual orientations were represented, not only heterosexual ones, and any sexuality falling within the very broad spectrum of LGBT was taught as normalized, not as a malady or deviancy. This conversation can easily be incorporated into other psychology courses when the discussion of sex versus gender comes up. The researchers felt that this same approach would work in other courses; by simply incorporating LGBT representation, which exists in every subject area, as opposed to ignoring them, would allow for an educational moment for students. The researchers argue that it is the responsibility of the academy to educate students in all areas, not only specific course objectives. The researchers knew that the results of their study could assist faculty across disciplines to be more inclusive

and more aware of LGBT student concerns, which, in turn, would help with college retention.

Two studies focused on exposing students to queer life through texts and writing within the composition classroom. While working at a rural community college, Mitchell (2008) introduced and educated her students about diversity, including sexual and gender diversity. Like other studies, the course utilized a queer-theme. She focused the course around texts and the normativity of queerness, rather than the experiences of the students. McRuer (2004) used a different approach within this dynamic, when the argument focused on the corporate-ness of colleges and universities, which filters down through courses and syllabi into what is seen as a compulsory straightness. Because of this, it is imperative for college instructors to use the classroom as a corrective sphere to engage and enlighten students of new cultural forms, “a construction of different identities,” and “construction of various types of relationships” (McRuer, 2004, pp. 47-48). This is intended to broaden and integrate students into the more diverse population which exists.

Sumara and Davis (1999) proposed that all curricula must include the study of sexuality, which, of course, must include transgender people. The idea behind this is to de-emphasize the prevalent heteronormativity, the assumption that everyone is heterosexual unless otherwise apprised implicitly and explicitly present in almost all subject matter curricula. In addition, she argues for the inclusion of queer theory as a normalized, not specialized, component of curricula.

The focal point here is the syllabi and course objectives rather than transgender student experiences within a classroom. Taking the LGBT curriculum idea further, Lovaas, Baroudi, and Collins (2002) advocate for equal treatment of transgender

experiences into the over-arching umbrella term of LGBT. Their argument was that when LGBT materials were incorporated into classes, rarely if ever were transgender representations included. The focal point seemed to be experiences of gay men and lesbians rather than transgender people. Using a queer theory approach, this study argues that minimizing exposure to transgender experiences and transgender lives and representations will inadvertently cause anxiety among transgender students.

Another study shows how best to introduce and include transgender lives into a gender studies classroom setting; this study (Agid & Rand, 2011) echoes previous studies regarding normalizing transgender people and the transgender experience, staying away from transgender as being a special topic or simply a special guest speaker, as one would imagine in a talk show setting, or devotion of a special topic unit to discuss persons who identify as trans. Instead, teachers can use transgender experiences in the same normalized way as heterosexual experiences as a way to not make transgender the other or the special topic or special guest.

Office of Student Affairs

Croteau and Talbot (1999) examined lesbian, gay, and bisexual concerns within college student affairs offices. Access to appropriate counseling and medical services was discussed, as well as issues concerning residence halls and bathrooms. The general heteronormativity of the college campus was also discussed. Education for students, administrators, and faculty members was deemed the best possible practice to help alleviate stressors of the LGBT student. However, academic issues were not addressed. Other studies investigated the stressors of transgender students in a college environment and how best to alleviate, or at least minimize, those stressors (Effrig, Bieschke, &

Locke, 2011; Zubernis & Snyder, 2007). Fanucce and Taub (2010) used the residence hall as the catalyst for gauging perceptions and experiences of both LGBT students and non-LGBT students. Specifically, the researchers wanted to know more about the assumed homonegativity LGBT students possibly faced and how cisgender students perceived the residence hall culture because of this. Homonegativity is used as a better descriptive for the perceived negative vibes/feelings experienced by LGBT students from non-LGBT students (Fanucce and Taub, 2010). This term is used many times instead of homophobia, as a more precise experience, general negativity, rather than phobia, a fear of LGBT persons.

More recently, Goodrich (2012) produced a qualitative study using grounded theory where four transgender students (the term used in this article was “transsexual”) were questioned about how they experienced college and how those specific experiences, both positive and negative, affected their desire to persist toward their goals in higher education. While this study was conducted in a higher educational setting, it focused on psychological aspects of transgender college lives rather than academics. The researcher wanted to learn more about the lived experiences of transgender students in this environment, on a psychological level. Dugan, Kusel, & Simounet (2012) conducted a study exploring perceptions, engagement, and educational outcomes of transgender students in higher education, finding significant differences between educational outcomes of non-LGBT students and those within the transgender spectrum. This study also echoed previous studies whereby transgender students did not feel they had the support, either institutionally or academically, to succeed and thrive.

Additionally, recent research considered LGBT and transgender students from a student affairs perspective, particularly how to attract and retain LGBT students; other studies have looked at recruitment efforts for LGBT students (Cegler, 2012), and specifically transgender students (Newhouse, 2013). Burleson (2010) looked at how campus climate has a direct impact on college choice for LGBT students. Along this same trend, Carroll, Güss, Hutchinson, and Gauler, (2012) conducted an online survey of graduating high school students and current college students to gauge perceptions of transgender students.

Furthermore, experts in the field of transgender college students, Beemyn and Rankin (2012) conducted a large-scale study to examine transgender lives on campuses. They looked at how colleges and universities can disrupt binary gender systems. They acknowledged that the gender binary set-up (male/female or man/woman) is off-putting and puts transgender students into a precarious situation, forcing them to fit into a prescribed gender category. This set-up alone, binary gender systems, is enough to make transgender students both uncomfortable and seemingly invisible. Large in scope, their study found overt and covert discrimination towards transgender people, as well as a general lack of knowledge by other students, faculty, and administrators of what transgender students go through.

English Composition Classroom

Pioneering work on this subject, Malinowitz's research (1995) had one respondent who displayed inhibitions of writing about any experience that could be considered gay. This was particularly hard on LGBT students when the work written for a grade would also be either read by classmates or read to the class. Compromise seems

to be what many LGBT students do when confronted with their writing in open-form classes and writing workshops (Furrow, 2012). Transgender and gay students remember experiencing bullying and frequent harassment during their middle and high school years, particularly those who were seen as “gender-variant” (Furrow, 2012). Compromising and avoiding any gay issues seems like the safer option.

Furrow (2012) conducted a study in 2005, which was published in 2012 looking at LGBT experiences within an English Composition classroom, a course required of nearly every college student across the U.S., regardless of major. Furrow theorized that the college English classroom, because it is a required course, would act as a microcosm of the college campus at-large. By looking within the composition classroom, inferences could be made for the student population, and information gathered by Furrow in best practices could be shared with other disciplines, as well as administrators on every level. While conversations are currently taking place about how best to incorporate transgender students, successfully, into campus life, whether by making gender neutral restrooms or student housing (Schmidt, 2015), academics is also an important part of this: How can we best serve transgender students academically? As it is, research shows that attrition is a problem, as more than 50% of LGBT students leave the first college they attend voluntarily, and 46% of these students never graduate (Freeman, Hall, & Bresciani, 2007). Thirty-eight percent of transgender students considered leaving their institution, while 63% felt so unsafe as to conceal their transgender identity altogether (Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010).

In 2005, Furrow found that within the confines of a college classroom, transgender students fear being marginalized (2012). One way to welcome transgender

students is to be inclusive by choosing materials in which their experiences are represented (Beemyn, 2003). A hetero-centric syllabus, whether intentional or not, leaves the transgender student out of the classroom norm of shared experience and recognizing oneself within elements of a course.

The Considerable Influence of the Composition Teacher

Furrow's (2012) seminal study, conducted over a period of three months was comprised of students who identified along the LGBT spectrum during the time in which they were enrolled in a Freshman Composition writing course. She noted that 24 of the 37 came out during the class. Twelve students were already out, and two students identified as transgender. The two transgender students identified as FTM (female-to-male) (Furrow, 2012). According to Lincoln, who identifies as trans, he was "nervous about having to write. I felt exposed. We had to read papers aloud. There was no confidentiality. I had to be careful what I wrote about" (Furrow, 2012, p. 150). Jared, another transgender student, expressed concern about the safety of transgender students within the classroom, stating many professors either were not equipped or chose not to deal with snide remarks, snickering, or other taunts that were usually a normative occurrence when an out transgender person is in a hetero-centric classroom.

Additionally, there was concern about how the person grading (whether it be a professor or graduate assistant) viewed written work that discussed gay issues/gay lives and whether there were biases, both known and unknown, that would affect the students' success in the course (Furrow, 2012). Jared went on to say that he regretted being an out transgender when professors disclosed this information to the class (Furrow, 2012, p. 151). Both students noted that what goes on within the classroom had a direct effect on

happenings outside of the classroom. For example, traditionally unsafe public spaces for gay men and transgender students are parking lots and restrooms. Jared explained that classroom discussions, disclosures, or written work dealing with gay issues could have direct consequences for the safety of gay and transgender students in these types of public spaces (Furrow, 2012). Lincoln, who had not started his physical transformation from FTM, chose not to come out as transgender (Furrow, 2012), thereby, choosing to remain silent. Several students in Furrow's (2012) study disliked the idea of being a representative or token for all LGBT people, an onerous responsibility, which they deemed inappropriate and unwanted. Students also remarked that this identified them as other. One student went so far as to say that "being the queer voice in class was burdensome" (Furrow, 2012, p. 150).

Furrow's (2012) research produced strong evidence of at least one normative assumption in the composition classroom, an assumption that could be carried into other classrooms. The assumption is that any student who does not self-identify or seem LGBT is automatically assumed to be straight. This revealed itself in classroom conversations where the assumption was that all those speaking were assumed straight. An interesting and troublesome caveat to the assumed heteronormativity within the classroom was that this put LGBT students into a position in which they had to assume the role of other, whether psychologically or socially (Furrow, 2012). Jared associated his comfort level within the class directly with the demeanor and attitude of the professor. He said, "My comfort depends on which class I am in and the mood of the teacher. I have had great levels of comfort when the professor was understanding. And the opposite when they were not" (Furrow, 2012, p. 152). Ironically, both Lincoln and Jared

agreed that their classmates, despite the climate discussed earlier, were accepting of papers written about LGBT issues (Furrow, 2012).

Using Furrow's (2012) research, how can instructors, both in composition courses and in other disciplines, create a classroom environment in which LGBT students feel included and visible? Three issues came up in Furrow's (2012) study: LGBT students wanted an accepting classroom climate; they also wanted to be included, rather than excluded, in both discussions and shared personal experiences, and course content in which they could identify, and lastly, they wanted some form of reprimand when the climate of a classroom got uncomfortable, when someone makes a snide remark. i.e., "That's so gay." Or, when a student giggles when gay/same sex issues come up, LGBT students feel if the instructor ignores it, or worse, laughs along, they cannot feel accepted in the course, and usually their grades and attendance reflect this. However, when an instructor strongly and swiftly steps in and maintains an attitude of inclusion and acceptance of diversity, the students feel they can become a participatory, vital part of the course. Lincoln echoed this when he said, "Teachers have a large responsibility to make anyone who for any reason might be a target of bullying and discrimination safe in their classroom" (Furrow, 2012, p. 152).

Lack of Research

While there have been recent studies looking at transgender students' experiences within a college classroom (Garvey & Rankin, 2015; Pryor, 2015), Furrow (2012) conducted the only known study which looks directly at the experiences of LGBT college students within a traditional English Composition classroom and none look specifically at transgender students' experiences in the composition classroom. While her study was

published in 2012, the research was conducted in 2005, making the research somewhat outdated. As previously stated, because of its unique make-up, the English Composition classroom provides a unique opportunity to gather important information regarding transgender students within this environment.

Because of the aforementioned delay in publishing Furrow's study the research is nearly 15 years old at this point, and outdated. Over the last ten years, transgender people have achieved unprecedented visibility, culminating in the year 2015, the year of Caitlyn Jenner, when former 1976 Olympian Bruce Jenner publicly transitioned from male-to-female (MTF) in front of anyone consuming American media. Because of Jenner's wide publicity base, from the Olympics to *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, GLAAD's Sarah Kate Ellis proclaimed that everyone in America now knows someone who is transgender (Boylan, 2015). And monumentally, 2015 was the year Gay Marriage was finally legalized in the United States (Chappell).

As transgender people are gaining more visibility both on campuses and off, their experiences need to be told. Because this course represents a cross-section of the student population, this information could translate well to the broader population. And, because there is a dearth of research regarding LGBT students in the Rocky Mountains, this research focused on this under-represented population. There is a need for this region and this student population to be represented in the literature.

CHAPTER III - METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative research methodology using phenomenology to examine the experiences of transgender college students in the English Composition classroom in the Rocky Mountains. I chose this approach to best capture the “lived experience” (van Manen, 1990, p. 9) of this student population. This chapter explains the complete methodology of this study, which includes a qualitative study, phenomenology, and the critical perspective employed, data collection, data analysis, credibility and dependability, and limitations.

Qualitative Study

Qualitative research is an “exploratory research” method (Stebbins, 2001, p. 48). According to Merriam (2009), “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 23). For this study, qualitative research offered the most compatible methodology to gain the information I was seeking, which was to know and understand the experiences transgender college students have within the intimate setting of an English Composition classroom, where personal writing is encouraged, and peer-review editing is the norm. This method offered a more in-depth inquiry into the subject, as well as offering an opportunity to use “richly descriptive” language, using “words and pictures rather than numbers” (Merriam, 2009, p. 34) to tell the story of transgender college students.

Phenomenology

I conducted a qualitative research study using phenomenology. According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenological studies can be divided into five categories:

“Ethnography, Grounded-Research Theory, Hermeneutics, Duquesne University’s Phenomenology, and Heuristics” (p. 33). Phenomenology focuses “on the experience itself” (Merriam, 2009, p. 42) and the “task of the phenomenologist, then, is to depict the essence or basic structure of experience” (p. 43). This method lets the subjects tell their stories vividly and I, as the researcher, was able to report on the full experience of their stories, no matter how evocative or complex. Husserl is credited with founding the discipline of phenomenology, which focused on ‘experiences of meaning’ (Pivčević, 1970, p. 12). These experiences create “phenomena” (p. 12) and can be used to explain how phenomena of experiences develop. Husserl (Moustakas, 1994) identified four steps within his research process of phenomenology.

The first step, which was deemed the epoch involves setting aside all biases, allowing the researcher to see things as close to seeing something for the first time as possible (Moustakas, 1994). The second step of this process allows for the researcher to find order and meaning in the research findings, again focusing on the experiences themselves to find both commonalities and differences (Moustakas, 1994). This step is also known as phenomenological reduction (Giorgi, 1997). During this step, researchers horizontalize the data and look for repetitive and relative statements. The third step is referred to as imaginative variation, which is the practice of looking for possible meanings in various ways, using perspectives, roles, and functions (Moustakas, 1994). These are not merely themes or categories; this step involves having the researcher find the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). This is where the researcher must use intuition to figure out how the individual pieces of the research fit together into a cohesive whole.

The final step involves synthesizing meanings and essences; this is where the researcher must construct meaning of the phenomena through experiences to form a statement using both structural and textural descriptions. Giorgi (1997) further explains this as:

Expressing the structure of the phenomenon. Once each meaning unit has been essentialized according to the proper disciplinary perspective, and redescribed in the language of the discipline, more or less the same process is applied to the transformed meaning units in order to determine which are essential for the phenomenon under study and which are not. Thus, with the help of free imaginative variation one describes the essential structure of the concrete, lived experience from the perspective of the discipline. (n.p.)

Finally, Moustakas (1994) reminds us that this type of study requires the researcher to be reflective and imaginative, knowing that it is difficult to fully unravel the essence of an experience.

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), “the key concern is understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants’ perspectives, not the *researcher’s*” (p. 16). This is an imperative part of the phenomenology research process, allowing the subjects to tell their own stories, exactly as it unfolds. The researcher should have no influence in how the story is told; they are to act as the conduit for getting the participants stories to the public. While the researcher is not to influence the research outcomes, it is the job of the researcher to make sense of the data. Creswell (2013) suggests a “bottom up” approach to disseminating raw data, “working back and forth between the themes and the database” (p. 45) until a pattern can be established.

Critical Perspective

In this study, I used queer theory as a conceptual framework. Queer theory, at its core, is the rejection of fixed identities, specifically, gender-specific identities (Jagose, 1996), like the binaries of woman or man and male or female. The argument rests on the idea that such a broad label cannot possibly be enough in which to sort people and make assumptions about what a man or woman would like, for example, or how they should act, what they should look like, and whom they should love. Diamond wrote in *Sexual Fluidity: Understanding Women's Love and Desire* (2009) that the spectrum in which people, and this can be for all people, love, desire, and behave is far too broad to be deduced to one gender, or two genders. She argues that all of us have within us this continuum of sexual fluidity, some to more varying degrees than others.

A more specialized faction within the realm of queer theory is transgender theory. Transgender theory also rejects the gender binaries put forth by queer theorists but takes it a step farther. The argument for transgender theory is that it is not queer, and it is not about gender. Being transgender is a more complex and multi-faceted experience, so no other theory would do justice to what transgender people experience; it is unique unto those whom identify. Stryker explains: "The transsexual body is an unnatural body. It is the product of medical science. It is a technological construction. It is flesh torn apart and sewn together again in a shape other than that in which it was born" (1994, p. 238). She further notes that "transsexuality more than any other transgender practice or identity represents the prospect of destabilizing the foundational presupposition of fixed genders" (1994, p. 238). The idea is that transgender is neither straight nor queer, so there needs to be a theory in which to examine this experience.

Gender binaries do not allow for the existence and lived experiences of transgender individuals, but queer identities also do not relate the reality of transgender life. Identities of feminine and masculine also hinder an identity that can be both, often at the same time. While there are the binaries of FTM (female-to-male) and MTF (male-to-female), within the realm of this identity is a myriad of experiences that encompass the transgender experience, which is not a queer experience (Heyes, 2003). Differences can be physical; not every transgender individual opts for gender-reassignment surgery, and those who do have surgery, have different variations of surgery. Additionally, not all transgender individuals are straight or gay once they transition. Heyes (2003) argues that many in the transgender community reject the terms FTM and MTF because they are viewed as an oversimplification of what it means to be transgender. It is misleading theorized Heyes (2003); there is not a transition to what would be deemed conventional male-hood and equally egregious is the assumption of a traditional definition of femaleness. Again, these are a set of binaries which do not apply. Queer theorists and transgender theorists agree with the minority status, as in LGBT are an under-represented population, but many disagree, wholeheartedly, even on the inclusion of the “T” in LGBT, saying that transgender is nothing like being a lesbian, being gay, or being bisexual (O’Driscoll, 1996).

To re-frame the study by Furrow (2012), transgender theory, with elements of queer theory worked to explore the issues between sex and gender, along with the ingrained gender binaries and constructions of which we all must adapt. Transgender students would benefit from an examination in which their experiences could be valued in a specific way that is unique to them and their individual and unique existence.

Positionality

As a child of the seventies, I have been keenly aware of the term transgender (or transexual, as it was more commonly called then) since elementary school. While I may not have known the intricacies of that terminology, I knew who Renée Richards was and watched her play tennis, and I remember that there was much controversy surrounding her. Renée Richards was born Richard Raskind and had, what was called at that time, a sex-change operation. She entered the world of professional tennis and was the first athlete to identify openly as trans. But, she was banned from playing in the U.S. Open as a female. In 1977, she was permitted to play due to a decision by the New York Supreme Court (Amdur, 1977). According to the article published at the time, “State Supreme Court Justice Alfred M. Ascione issued a preliminary injunction yesterday barring the United States Tennis Association, the United States Open Tennis Championship Committee and the Women's Tennis Association from excluding the 42 year-old transsexual from the world's richest tournament because of her inability to pass the Barr body test” (Amdur, 1977).

In the eighties, my mother, a business owner, had an employee hired as Jennifer, who during her tenure at my mother’s company, became Damien and would be using the men’s as opposed to the women’s restroom. My mother complied. A few years later, Damien was found hanging from a rope in an abandoned warehouse in downtown Houston. When my mother relayed this news to me, she mentioned that only a few weeks earlier, Damien had come to work bruised after being attacked for being transgender.

Fifteen years later, as I lived in Los Angeles, rumors swirled about the director of the hit franchise movies *The Matrix*. Was he now a she? At the time, Larry Wachowski was gaining unwanted tabloid press for what seemed to be his changing physical appearance. A few years after that, Chasity Bono, whom I adored as a young girl watching *The Sonny and Cher Show*, came out as trans, adopting the new name Chaz. For me, people who identified as transgender existed, and to my brain, that was the way it was—nothing more; nothing less. I cannot say exactly why these stories resonated so deeply with me, but they have. But, for me, a straight White Anglo-Saxon Protestant from the South, it was not until I met Alex Myers, that my experiential knowledge of what it means to be transgender came to be. I met Alex in graduate school in Vermont. I was now an adult woman, in my-mid-thirties and now had a classmate who was transgender. Alex had been the first openly transgender student at Harvard College in the nineties. After he came out to us, his classmates, as FTM (female-to-male), he said, “Google me.” And, I did. I spent hours on the computer researching him and his experiences. Whether he knows it or not, meeting Alex Myers had an unimaginable impact on me. A few years after meeting Alex, I watched a speech Lana Wachowski (formerly Larry Wachowski) gave at the Human Rights Campaign Visibility Award Acceptance Speech in 2012. Those two people and their experiences were the catalysts for my being here, writing this dissertation.

Lana’s words were beyond eloquent, beyond compelling—here was a successful Hollywood writer and director, who discussed the struggle with her identity:

As I grew older an intense anxious isolation coupled with constant insomnia began to inculcate an inescapable depression. I have never slept much but during

my sophomore year in high school, while I watched many of my male friends start to develop facial hair, I kept this strange relentless vigil staring in the mirror for hours, afraid of what one day I might see. Here in the absence of words to defend myself, without examples, without models, I began to believe voices in my head -- that I was a freak, that I am broken, that there is something wrong with me, that I will never be lovable.

Years later I find the courage to admit that I am transgender and this doesn't mean that I am unlovable. I meet a woman, the first person that has made me understand that they love me not in spite of my difference but because of it. She is the first person to see me as a whole being. And every morning I get to wake up beside her I can't begin to tell you how grateful I am for those two blue eyes in my life.

If I can be that person for someone else [pause, applause] then the sacrifice of my private civic life may have value. I know I am also here because of the strength and courage and love that I am blessed to receive from my wife, my family and my friends. And in this way I hope to offer their love in the form of my materiality to a project like this one started by the HRC, so that this world that we imagine in this room might be used to gain access to other rooms, to other worlds previously unimaginable (Wachowski, 2012).

While I am not part of the transgender community, nor am I lesbian, gay, or bisexual, I consider myself an ally. I feel this is an underrepresented community and at times, a very misunderstood population. My part in this research was to simply report the stories of transgender college students in the English Composition classroom as

accurately as possible. And, I am well-aware of my cisgender privilege. For example, for the most part, I feel safe using a public restroom; I am never mis-gendered or mis-named; my personal space is usually respected, to name but a few privileges I have that many transgender people do not (Pride.com). But, as I stated earlier, transgender people have been in my life, either in pop culture or experientially since I was young, and I have an interest in telling their stories.

Additionally, my role as a teacher has informed my interest in this subject. I have taught college English Composition courses for over a decade. And during this time, much has changed. I have seen how the in-class discussions have changed, particularly when addressing LGBT issues and topics. Students seem interested in this topic in a way they did not when I began my teaching career. A shift, it seems, is happening. My role as teacher is what drives this research. I want more information on how best to make transgender students feel safe and comfortable while in my classes, but I also want them to be an equal part of the class, their voices and experiences as whole and valid as every other student. I want their stories represented, and I want them to have a voice.

Data Collection

I conducted a qualitative research study whereby I interviewed transgender students about their experiences in the English Composition classroom. To locate this population of students, I reached out to LGBTQ student groups on college campuses, such as LGBTQ student organizations and Gay-Straight Alliances in the state of Colorado to find participants. I made contact via email with faculty advisors and student representatives of these groups asking permission to solicit student participation for the project. Through this process, I used snowball sampling or chain referral sampling

(Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981) for gathering more participants, as I knew the population I was targeting was small. I conducted a few interviews in-person. I also utilized FaceTime, as well as email to gather the needed information. I conducted 11 interviews, before data saturation was reached.

Guiding Research Questions

Q1: How do transgender students describe their experiences in the English Composition classroom?

Q2: What, if any, influence does the presumed atmosphere of heteronormativity have on transgender students' experiences within the course?

Q3: How safe do transgender students feel about discussing their personal lives?

Data Analysis

I used Merriam's (2008) method of looking for "tentative categories or themes" (p. 181) as I reviewed my notes, transcripts, and other research materials I utilized. Her method requires "ongoing analysis" and "the final product is shaped by the data that are collected and the analysis that accompanies the entire process (p. 181). Reading and re-reading my data helped me refine and crystalize my study. I looked for overlapping ideas and concepts to further explore, and I assessed information which does not overlap.

Credibility and Dependability

Qualitative research relies on the trustworthiness of the research participants. Having and presenting accurate information for this kind of project is imperative; therefore, to help ensure credibility, I used member checks (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell & Walter, 2016). During this process, interview participants were given full access to all

notes and interview transcripts to make sure of the reliability of what they said and what I wrote in my study.

According to Shenton (2004), dependability in research requires that “the processes within the study should be reported in detail, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same results” (p. 9). My role was to give accurate accounts of all information generated from this study and to create a study that has replicability. Using member checks further enhanced the dependability of this study (Merriam, 2008).

Limitations

For this study, I limited participants to college students currently enrolled in an English Composition course or students who completed an English Composition course within the last two years. The study was open to students who attended community college or a traditional 4-year institution. Age was not a factor. Any student who self-identified as transgender was able to participate. Additionally, the study was limited to students who currently attend college in Colorado or have attended within the last two years.

Limitations to this study were how straightforward and honest the research participants were. Since this was a qualitative research project in which I interviewed participants, I had to rely on the participants’ answers to be factual. I explained to all participants my interest in transgender issues and my interest in their stories. Additionally, I clarified that I am not transgender, nor Lesbian, Gay, or Bi-sexual, and my role was as an ally. Because I procured participants on a voluntary basis, the intent

was that participants wanted to be as honest and forthright as possible, as I was not looking to make judgments but merely to tell the participants' stories.

In summary, this chapter detailed the methodologies for this study. The study was a phenomenological qualitative study. The critical perspectives used were queer theory and transgender theory. I found research participants through college LGBTQ and Gay-Straight Alliance organizations, and I used a snowball sampling or referral affect (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981) in gaining the needed number of participants.

CHAPTER IV– RESULTS

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study, using both queer theory and transgender theory was to examine the realities of transgender college students within an English Composition classroom in the Rocky Mountains. Transgender students face unique experiences on college campuses and in academic classrooms. This study sought to fully examine experiences transgender college students had in the academic setting of a composition class and ascertained their needs within that class. The composition classroom offers an intimate setting, as classes are usually capped at 20-25 students. Additionally, personal writing is encouraged and expected. Within this context and setting, I feel that I was able to gain valuable information on the authentic experiences of transgender college students. The findings of this study can be translated to other disciplines campus-wide to serve the transgender college population more appropriately.

Guiding Research Questions

Q1: How do transgender students describe their experiences in the English Composition classroom?

Q2: What, if any, influence does the presumed atmosphere of heteronormativity have on transgender students' experiences within the course?

Q3: How safe do transgender students feel about discussing their personal lives?

Research Design

Data Collection and Analysis

I conducted a qualitative research study whereby I interviewed transgender students about their experiences in the English Composition classroom. Once I received approval from my university's IRB board (Appendix A), I began looking for participants. To locate this population of students, I contacted LGBTQ student groups on college campuses, such as LGBTQ student organizations and Gay-Straight Alliances within the state of Colorado to find participants. I made contact via email with faculty advisors and student officers of these groups asking permission to solicit student participation for the project and requested they share my research request and dissertation information with their members and with anyone else who may be interested (Appendix B). During this process, I used snowball sampling or chain referral sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981) for gathering more participants, as I knew the population I was targeting was small.

I anticipated conducting between 12-24 interviews. A total of thirteen people responded to my call for participants, emailing me about their interest. Nearly all of them mentioned they heard about my study through a friend, an example of snowball sampling or chain referral sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). One potential participant identified as transgender but attended college nearly 20 years ago, so he was disqualified. Additionally, another potential participant attended college online, so he was also disqualified. The final study had eleven participants who met all the criteria: over 18 years of age, attends or attended college in the state of Colorado, took English Composition within the last two years or is currently enrolled, and identifies as transgender.

Participants initially reached out to me through my USM email address. After contact was made, I asked each person if they met the criteria (18 years of age, English Composition student currently or within the last two years, attends college in Colorado, identifies as transgender). If all criteria were met by an email confirming these details, I emailed the formal consent form to each participant, had them sign it, and scan it back to me (Appendix C). Once the consent form was received, I emailed back to schedule either an in-person interview or a video interview, about twenty minutes in length.

My initial intent was to conduct all 11 interviews in-person, but due to geographic constraints and several participants concerned about their safety, I conducted all but two interviews through FaceTime video. Those who expressed safety concerns were worried about being outed to a larger population and what kind of repercussions they may face after their participation in this research. I made the decision to utilize video interviews to ease participants' concerns. Once interviews commenced, we exchanged pleasantries, and I made sure participants knew that the interview was going to be recorded and asked their permission to begin recording. Even interviews conducted via FaceTime, I used a small recording device to record the interviews, to make sure all of my notes matched and to limit discrepancies. I explained that participation in the study was voluntary, and participants were able to withdraw at any time. Additionally, every effort was made to protect participants' anonymity and confidentiality. I let each participant know that no real names or identifying characteristics (hair color, build) would be used in the notes or in the final dissertation—I would be using pseudonyms. I also asked each person how they identified on the transgender spectrum (a few examples: gender-neutral, MTF). I, then, went down the list of questions from my questionnaire (Appendix D).

At the conclusion of the interviews, I thanked each participant and let them know that I would be back in touch once the interview notes were typed up. To ensure credibility, I used member checks (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell & Walter, 2016), giving full access of notes and research materials to each participant. Once transcriptions were complete, I emailed each participant, attaching a copy of my transcription of their interview and told them to read through for errors, inconsistencies, or anything they would like redacted. I offered to schedule follow-up video chats to make sure there was nothing more they wanted to add. All participants agreed with the interview notes, and no changes were necessary; no follow-up interviews were scheduled.

All data was kept confidential. No names were asked or written/recorded as part of this process. Also, no identifying features were asked of participants. All voice recorded interviews and all written notes made by the researcher were kept in a locked drawer at the researcher's home, with only the researcher having access to the key. After the process was complete, all papers were shredded, and all tapes were destroyed.

Participants

I interviewed eleven participants for this study. Participants' ages ranged from 19-35; the median age was 23. Of the participants, 10 were white; one was Asian. Ten of the 11 participants were FTM (female-to-male), while one was MTF (male-to-female). Of the 11 participants, 6 were out about being transgender, while 5 said they did not out themselves as transgender. Only one participant attended a community college; all other participants attended or had attended 4-year institutions. Nearly all participants asked about anonymity and expressed concerns about email and FaceTime names and profiles. All participants were given pseudonyms.

Individual Interviews

Adam: a 24 year-old non-traditional student attending community college. He loves to travel and speaks several languages. His dream job is to write travel books or have a show on HGTV doing travelogues. Adam has an outgoing and friendly personality. He was enrolled in English Composition when he participated in the study. He identified as FTM (female-to-male) and was open to his classmates about his gender. He had 18 students in his course.

Billy: a 35 year-old non-traditional student attending a traditional 4-year university. He loves to watch football, both college and professional. He also loves animals, and especially big dogs like Labs. He enjoys the outdoors, hunting and fishing. He comes off as quiet but has a big laugh. His dream job would be to work for the forest service. Billy identified as FTM (female-to-male). There were 15 students in the English Composition class he was enrolled in while participating in the study. He did not disclose his transgender identity to some of his classmates.

Colden: a 25 year-old non-traditional student who attended a 4-year university. Colden identified as FTM (female-to-male). Colden is an avid video game player. He has met people around the world, while playing games online. He has a quiet personality. He wants to work in IT or anything having to do with computers. His English Composition class consisted of more than 50 students. Colden did not disclose his identity to his classmates.

Dillon: a 19 year-old student attending a 4-year university. He identified as FTM (female-to-male). Dillon loves to read. He said he had read the whole Harry Potter series twice. He is also a fan of film. He hopes to one day be involved in the movie industry.

His English Composition course had 30 students. He was not out about his transgender identity to his classmates.

Everett: a 28 year-old non-traditional student who attended a 4-year university. He identified as FTM (female-to-male). Everett wants to move to a big city like New York or Chicago. He likes music and loves Netflix. He is looking at finishing his degree and going into nursing. He had 18 classmates in his English Composition class. Everett did not identify as transgender when enrolled in the course.

Felicity: a 19 year-old student who attended a 4-year university. She identified as MTF (male-to-female). Felicity loves to cook and hopes to be on the Food Network one day. She also loves cats and her ferret, Bongo. Her English Composition class had 35 students. Felicity is Asian and was the only non-white participant, as well as being the only person who identified as MTF. Felicity is discerning when disclosing her identity.

Garrick: a 25 year-old student attending a 4-year university. He identified as FTM (female-to-male). Garrick like clothes and current music. He also enjoys watching basketball. He is pursuing a career in business. There was a total of 75 students in his English Composition class. Garrick was semi-open about his identity to select people in his class.

Harrison: a 21 year-old student attending a 4-year university. He identified as FTM (female-to-male). Harrison is an amazing athlete. He does CrossFit and plays soccer. He is not sure about his career yet, he keeps changing his mind, either business or law. There were 45 students in his English Composition class. Harrison was semi-open about his identity.

Ian: a 19 year-old student attending a 4-year university. Ian identified as FTM (female-to-male). Ian wants to work on a ranch. He is only in college because his parents made him go. He said he will get his degree in agricultural business and then work on a ranch or even have his own one day. There were 85 students in his English Composition class. Ian chose not to disclose his transgender identity while in the class.

Jack: a 25 year-old student attending a 4-year university. He identified as FTM (female-to-male). Jack can fix anything with his hands. He loves tinkering on old cars and taking things apart and putting them back together. He is looking to pursue a degree in architecture or engineering. There were 60 students in his English Composition class. Jack was open about his transgender identity.

Kalob: a 22 year-old student attending a 4-year university. Kalob identified as FTM (female-to-male). Kalob likes 90s hip-hop and horror films. He is looking at pursuing a career in psychology. There were 20 students in his English Composition class. Kalob was open about his identity.

Interview Process

Before starting the interview process, I did not know what to expect. My main concern was participants being wary of my intentions. I was happy that all of those who contacted me seemed excited I was doing this work and did not seem overly concerned that a middle-aged cisgender person happened to be the one conducting the interviews. The interviews held over FaceTime, naturally, were a little easier to conduct; the imagined impersonal nature of social media made things less awkward, and the conversations seemed to flow. The interviews conducted in person were a bit more intense; I think this was more on my part than the participants. Asking people about a

very specific and personal part of themselves face-to-face seemed intrusive, even though this is what they had agreed to discuss. I was very aware of how I responded to each answer and chose my words very carefully for follow-up questions. I was hyper-aware of unintentionally offending the participants with my words or even an unintended look or gesture. While, I did become more comfortable as the face-to-face interviews went on, I never really felt settled in, as they say due to my cisgender status. This was interesting as I always saw myself as unflappable discussing personal and/or controversial topics, but the interview nature combined with the knowledge that this would go into a dissertation, a public document, made me really feel the heaviness of what I was doing. All participants were gracious during interviews and most complimented my research topic.

Once I was alone with my scribbled and abbreviated interview notes and my mini-tapes, the real work began. I was used to transcribing tapes, as I worked as a freelance journalist for alternative magazines in California years ago. The transcription process was interesting, as themes emerged pretty quickly. There was the random comment here and there; comments that had no real significance to our topic, but the main themes were quite visible, as I transcribed. Once I had all of my notes and had checked with all participants for accuracy, I used colored highlighters to organize any similarities. The one topic that I was not certain I should include was stealth, the ability to pass as the desired gender. Only 2 participants mentioned being stealth, but to me it was such a significant and illuminating revelation, that I knew I had to include it.

After putting colored sections together, I looked for similar words, wording, and word groups, and then I was able to assign names to the emerging themes. Deciding how to best organize the flow of information came down to how I had organized my Guiding

Research Questions. There was information that I had to leave out, but as stated earlier, it was not pertinent to the study I was conducting.

Document Analysis

Emerging Themes

As I reviewed my notes and interview transcripts, several themes and sub-themes emerged, as I began the process of aggregating my notes. I used Merriam's (2008) method of looking for "tentative categories or themes" (p. 181). This required me to read and re-read my research materials dozens of times in order to locate commonalities in the data and helped me refine and crystalize my study. I looked for overlapping ideas and concepts to further explore, and I assessed information which does not overlap.

While reviewing the guiding research questions concerning safety and the likelihood of students disclosing their transgender identities openly within a composition class setting, I was able to notice themes and sub-themes, using Creswell's (2013) "bottom up" approach to disseminating raw data, "working back and forth between the themes and the database" (p. 45) until a pattern can be established. The following themes and sub-themes emerged: Heteronormativity, Increased Anonymity, Attitude of the Professor, and Safety and Disclosure. Sub-themes included larger class sizes and stealth.

Heteronormativity

Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs (2005) have long argued that the environment of college campuses as heteronormative is pervasive, both inside and outside of the classroom. Heteronormativity is a hierarchical social construction in which gender and sexuality are separated, where unless otherwise stated, everyone is presumed heterosexual (genderandeducation, 2011). Most participants in this study, seven out of

11 mentioned the heteronormative atmosphere within their English Composition course. In terms of their experiences, a few participants mentioned that all dating or love stories either read or referenced within the class were cisgender (heterosexual). An example that several participants mentioned was *Romeo and Juliet*. For example, a professor may have been discussing love or romance and used characters in *Romeo and Juliet* as the ideal or normalized version of teenage love or doomed love. This made students feel as though their story was never acknowledged. No same sex couples were mentioned, nor any transgender couples. I asked how this made them feel, and Adam said,

We're never included, I mean never; there is never a trans person mentioned, well, unless it has to do with bathrooms or Trump. Even then, it's pretty sketchy. You have to pick when you want to speak up or out. You have to have nerves of steel. Being trans requires balls.

Jack said that "heteronormativity is so normal at this point, it's like air." He mentioned that he no longer gets mad because "it is what it is," and he picks which battles he is going to fight. His class had 60 students, so he chose not to speak up or speak with his professor privately about the matter. Billy echoed Jack's sentiments, saying that his professor took a very heteronormative approach while teaching. "I'll give you an example," Billy said,

he would say things like 'for the men in the class, if your wife or girlfriend needed blah blah blah.' He never took into consideration that there were other people, non-cis in his class, and that's ignorant; we exist; he must know we exist.

Billy's experiences of feeling invisible and unseen echo those found by other transgender students in college classrooms (Beemyn & Rankin, 2012). One participant, Felicity, thought college would be more diverse. She said,

I loved English in high school, and it was pretty hetero too, but it didn't really bother me then. But, now in college and having transitioned, it really bothers me. But, like what am I supposed to do? There's 30 other kids in my class, be the trans voice of reason? Or, the weirdo that everyone stares and snickers at. I'd rather keep my head down and pass the class. But, ugh, its super-annoying.

Harrison added another facet of the composition classroom:

Sometimes, there will be debates on 'fun topics' or 'controversial topics,' and they are discussing my life. Gay marriage. Trans rights. Bathrooms and the military; it definitely makes it hard to concentrate on just being a regular college student when your normal is being attacked and talked about like a novelty.

Garrick said this about his experience:

People are stupid, but it's like they don't mean to be usually; they just have no idea what they're talking about. The class was very male/female in everything we read and discussed. Rarely, LGBTQ topics might come up, but usually the complete idiot would rule the conversation, like bring up God and the Bible, and the professor just kind of did nothing. I thought college was so progressive, but I guess it depends on where you go and the people in your class, and the teacher.

Increased Anonymity

Sub-theme: Large class sizes

Out of 11 participants, only four had what would be considered a normal composition class size of 20-25 students. Most participants had much larger classes, ranging from 30-85 students per class. This made it possible for students to experience increased anonymity within the confines of the class. Because of increased class sizes, professors were not able to get to know each student on a personal level, which happens in the smaller, capped classes. Additionally, students do not exchange work in small groups, as has been the practice of these writing workshop-style settings. Instead, submissions are done using electronic platforms, like Blackboard, Canvas, or Google Classroom, omitting the face-to-face exchange of writing critiques and commentary.

This is a very different experience than I have had, as I have taught college composition classes for 11 years, at both the community college level and the 4-year university level, in Hawaii, New York, Mississippi, and Colorado, and I have never had this experience. My composition classes, because they were deemed writing-intensive were capped at either 20 or 25 students. An integral part of this study was the small class size and the sharing of personal writing. However, a benefit to the increase in class size was the ability to blend in, as Colden put it, “It was much easier to go unnoticed” in his composition class of 50 students. By having large theater-type classrooms and all written work being submitted electronically, he felt it was easier to maintain a degree of anonymity.

Sub-theme: Stealth

Stealth, in the transgender world, is the ability of a transgender person to pass as their desired gender (Pfeffer, 2016). Being stealth was brought up by two participants, Billy and Felicity, during interviews. They both knew they had the ability to be perceived as their new identity, so they had a greater comfort level, they assumed, than some other people who are transgender. Billy said,

I look like a regular dude, I have a bigger build and facial hair, so I can be stealth, meaning no one knows I'm trans unless I tell them. But, I know I'm trans, so. I feel it's maybe easier for me because I can blend in.

While Felicity said, "I'm pretty stealth; I pass pretty well, so I only tell certain people I'm trans. And, I've been on hormones for awhile." The other nine participants did not use the term stealth, but some mentioned whether they had begun hormone therapy or if their current body-type may have caused questions in passing as their new gender. Colden expressed concern because he was "shy and pre-hormone," so he felt it was a little harder for him to pass. This coupled with the larger class sizes allows for some students to have increased anonymity.

Attitude of the Professor

According to participants, the professor sets the tone for the class and how they will or will not choose to participate in the course itself, the type of writing they will do, and how they will interact with others in the class. Furrow (2012) found that many professors are not equipped or choose not to deal with jokes and/or derogatory remarks made about LGBT people, specifically, people who are transgender. Additionally, she found that transgender students were concerned with how their identity would affect their

grade in the course. Lastly, Furrow found that speaking up and being out had its own set of consequences. For example, one student mentioned “being the queer voice in class was burdensome” (Furrow, 2012, p. 150). Four out of 11 participants in this study mentioned their professors in positive and negative ways within the class. The professor’s perceived attitude towards LGBT or transgender issues dictated how individual students approached the class. Garrick said, “My professor was very progressive, so I disclosed to my identity to him and a few of my classmates.” Kalob also felt comfortable enough to disclose: “I was out to some of my professors and to a few of my classmates.” Harrison was happy that his professor used “gender neutral pronouns.” While these experiences seem overwhelmingly positive, Billy had a negative experience. He was caught off-guard by his professor’s “openly hetero approach to teaching.” He further explained that the absence of any references to non-binary experiences was problematic. While these four participants felt strongly about the professor’s role within a college classroom, setting the tone, and hopefully being an ally, the other seven did not specify any role the professor had in their experience of the course.

Safety and Disclosure

One of the guiding research questions was about safety and disclosure: How safe do transgender students feel disclosing their identity within the composition classroom setting? Participants had a myriad of experiences concerning this question, and it was the question that elicited the most conversation. Participants had very strong feelings about this topic. While four out of 11 participants chose not to openly disclose their transgender identity to the class, various circumstances determined how and when each

participant chose to manage either disclosing or not. Adam, who was in an intimate class of 18 students said, “I don’t pass well, so I feel my identity wasn’t respected.” While Colden, who was in a much larger class of 50, mentioned that he was asked directly about his gender by different classmates, “6-7 times during the course. I only disclosed being transgender when asked directly.”

Many participants noted that it was a delicate balance to disclose or not to disclose. They cited several issues when deciding if they wanted to disclose their transgender identity. Participants referenced circumstances like who they were telling and why they were telling as part of their consideration. Another issue was how it was brought up. If the question was asked privately, they felt comfortable enough to disclose. This was not the case when asked in small groups or large groups. Participants felt most comfortable when they volunteered the information in an organic way. During interviews, elements like the atmosphere and “vibe” of the person and/or the class came up a lot. Felicity had an interesting take on this when she said, “I do disclose that I am trans, but I do not go around telling just anyone.” When I pressed and asked her why she felt that way, she said, “Because some people do not act in a positive way.” Kalob mentioned how people can be “total jerks” and “make things more difficult, making jokes such as ‘I identify as an airplane’ and things of that nature.” While overall, Kalob was fine discussing his personal life and never felt unsafe, he said he always had to brace himself for those “jerk” reactions. Kalob had a composition class of only 20 students, so he heard everything, good and bad. Felicity was surprised that this type of behavior happened in college, “I thought college was going to be a little more progressive, but I did feel uncomfortable a few times” in my English class. She mentioned that people

were either supportive once they knew or dismissive of her as a person. Ian, who had a class of 85 students in a theater-style classroom found it easier for him to avoid discussing specifics about his identity. He said, “I was able to discuss my personal life without getting into my gender.” While he seemed confident when he said this, he also said, “I did not disclose my trans identity because it would have made me uncomfortable for everyone to know.” Harrison seemed to have similar concerns. When asked about disclosing his transgender identity, he said “I did not openly discuss my trans identity in the classroom; that is just asking for trouble.”

My longest interview was with Everett, a 28 year-old FTM (female-to-male) attending a traditional 4-year university. When he was taking English Composition, he thought he was a lesbian. He told me, “I knew I was different, but it took a while to put it all together.” He explained that he did not even realize he was gay until he was in high school, while most of his contemporaries told him they always knew they were gay. He elaborated, “I come from a Christian family, and I was very sheltered.” When he was in his early twenties, he realized he was a transgender man, not a lesbian woman, “And then finally, it made sense.” I chose to include Everett as a participant because he said that even when he identified as lesbian, he knew that was not quite right. When he was in his composition class, he mentioned that he had that sense of being invisible and of otherness that many of the other participants felt. It was not until he fully realized that he was transgender that he felt “real and whole.” While his journey extended through his composition course, I found that his experiences were valuable and only added to this study.

Summary

This chapter detailed the findings of my study, which looked at the experiences of transgender college students in the English Composition classroom in the Rocky Mountains. Eleven participants were interviewed from colleges in the state of Colorado looking at three overarching questions: (1) How do transgender students describe their experiences in the English Composition classroom? (2) What, if any, influence does the presumed atmosphere of heteronormativity have on transgender students' experiences within the course? (3) How safe do transgender students feel about discussing their personal lives? While aggregating my notes and interview transcriptions, using Merriam's (2008) method of looking for "tentative categories or themes" (p. 181), several themes became evident: Heteronormativity, Increased Anonymity, Attitude of the Professor, and Safety and Disclosure. Sub-themes included class size and stealth. Transgender college students face multiple obstacles while attending college, and the hope is that this study can help them within the academic classroom. Chapter 5 will review the Summary of the Study, Connection to the Literature, Implications of the Findings for Practice, and Recommendations for Further Research.

CHAPTER V– CONCLUSION

This qualitative phenomenological study sought to better understand the realities of transgender college students within the English Composition classroom. Over the last decade, more and more studies have addressed transgender college students (Beemyn & Rankin, 2012; Goodrich, 2012; Iconis, 2010; Nicolazzo, 2016; Smirles, Wetherilt, Murphy, & Patterson, 2009), but few have examined how transgender students navigate and experience the confines of the English Composition class. This is a unique class because it is labeled “writing intensive” and is usually capped with no more than 20-25 students, where personal writing is expected and often shared in peer-review sessions. Additionally, this class represents a microcosm of the college population, as nearly every person, no matter their major, must take English Composition. Results from this study can be shared throughout other disciplines and with administrators college-wide.

My interest in this population dates as far back as my childhood in the 1970s, from watching Renée Richards play tennis on television, to seeing little Chasity Bono from *The Sonny and Cher Show*, very publicly become Chaz, a FTM transgender man in 2008. These events along with meeting Alex Myers (FTM) while I was in graduate school in Vermont sparked my interest in transgender issues. Serendipitously, while researching and going through my doctoral program, transgender people were gaining attention in ways never previously seen. One example was the very public transition of 1976 track and field Gold Medalist and *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* father figure, Bruce Jenner very ceremoniously becoming Caitlyn, a MTF transgender woman at the age of 65 (Bissinger, 2015). As GLAAD's Sarah Kate Ellis put it: “Now everyone knows someone who is transgender” (Boylan, 2015).

Additionally, I have taught English Composition classes for over a decade, and I know the intimate environment, the small class sizes, and the personal connections I form with each student due to class discussions and personal writing. I was interested in this specific topic because of the changing landscape and what I deemed as a shift within these classes. Were people becoming more open and accepting? Did being transgender matter as much today as it did when Furrow (2012) did her study in 2005? In my classes, I noticed an increase in openly LGBT students, in both rural and urban settings, so my assumption was that the climate had changed, shifted for the better. I sensed it was time to revisit and update Furrow's study, looking only at transgender student experiences within an English Composition classroom.

Summary of the Study

I set out to conduct interviews with college students who identified as transgender and were currently taking English Composition or had taken it in the last two years. All participants needed to be 18 years old. My research focused on the Rocky Mountains (Colorado). To find research participants, I contacted colleges and universities within the state of Colorado and reached out to GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance) and LGBT Clubs asking them to pass along information about my study to members of their groups or to anyone they thought may be interested. Interested participants reached out to me via my USM email address. Thirteen people contacted me about participating in the study. Two of the 13 did not meet the criteria, as one attended college online and the other attended college nearly 20 years ago. In the end, 11 people met all the necessary criteria: 18 years of age or over, currently attend or attended college in the state of Colorado, currently

enrolled in English Composition or had taken the class in the last 2 years and identified as transgender.

Initially, I was concerned that my position as cisgender would be an issue when interviewing the research participants. I wondered how honest they would be? Would they trust me as an ally? What could I possibly know of their lived lives and experiences? I made sure to tell each participant of my long interest in the subject of transgender people and of my role as an English Composition teacher. I assured each participant that I was merely here to report, not to judge. I wanted to tell their stories as honestly as they told them to me. Participants seemed at ease with me as their interviewer/researcher; however, most participants were concerned about anonymity and how it would be maintained. I assured each participant that only pseudonyms would be used in the study, and there would be no mention of college names or any identifying personal characteristics.

Interviews were conducted either in person or over FaceTime video. A set list of 10 questions were asked of each participant (Appendix D), and these questions addressed the overreaching themes of the Guiding Research Questions:

Q1: How do transgender students describe their experiences in the English Composition classroom?

Q2: What, if any, influence does the presumed atmosphere of heteronormativity have on transgender students' experiences within the course?

Q3: How safe do trans students feel about discussing their personal lives?

Connection to the Literature

There has been an increase in the literature on transgender college students over the last few decades, much of it concerning specific topics within higher education. Current research on transgender college students generally focuses on campus safety, healthcare, residence halls and restroom facilities, as well as overall experiences of transgender students in campus life (Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005; Beemyn & Rankin, 2012; Goodrich, 2012; McKinney, 2005; Nicolazzo, 2016; Smirles, Wetherilt, Murphy, & Patterson, 2009). Other studies are more specialized; for example, there are a few studies examining the difference between transgender and LGB, many studies arguing for a separation of this commonly used moniker, as it implies sameness. Researchers argue that being transgender is nothing like being lesbian, gay, or bisexual (O'Driscoll, 1996). Renn (2010) asserts that transgender is a gender identity, not a sexual orientation, and Spade (2008) goes so far as to call the moniker “the LGBfakeT movement.”

Another area of study concerning transgender college students revolves around the presumed heteronormative atmosphere of most college campuses and the inherent homophobia (Draughn, Elkins, & Roy 2002, Iconis, 2010; Longerbeam, Inkelas, Johnson, & Lee, 2007; Rivers, 2015). I found this to be true as well in my study. In addition, several studies focused on ways to bring LGBT issues and themes into a college classroom setting. One study chose to make queer the norm in a composition class and heterosexuality the other (Malinowitz, 1995). Multiple studies looked at ways to teach sexual literacy in the classroom setting (Abbott, 2009; Alexander, 2008; Alexander & Gibson, 2004; Alexander & Wallace, 2009; Marinara, Alexander, Banks, & Blackmon,

2009). In the realm of examining the office of student affairs, Croteau and Talbot (1999) explored ways to better serve LGB students within the student affairs office; while a few other studies (Effrig, Bieschke, & Locke, 2011; Zubernis & Snyder, 2007) looked at stressors on this particular student population. Focusing on residence halls, Fanucce and Taub (2010) were able to gauge experiences of both LGBT and non-LGBT students. Similar studies were conducted by Goodrich (2012) and Dugan, Kusel, and Simounet (2012). Lastly, Furrow's (2012) seminal study was the only one that looked specifically at how LGBT students experienced the English Composition classroom, the study on which this dissertation is based. In Furrow's study (2012), transgender students felt alienated and ostracized or simply invisible; I found this to be consistent with my findings, as well.

Furthermore, I chose to use both queer theory and transgender theory to frame my research because I was able to gain a more comprehensive yet nuanced outcome. In very broad terms, queer theory examines and challenges gender norms and all sexual behavior, from normative to deviant (Henderson-Espinoza, 2015). Transgender theory allows for the more complex examination of the experiences of being transgender, which is not a sexual orientation nor specifically about gender (Heyes, 2003). Being transgender is a more complex experience, so the advent of transgender theory helps to look solely at those unique experiences.

Implications of the Findings for Practice

My original theory was that the experiences of transgender college students within the English Composition classroom had changed substantially since Furrow's study (2012), which was conducted in 2005 and published in 2012. The reality is that

little has changed. Furrow (2012) conducted her study in 2005, and her findings were consistent with my own. She published her study in 2012, but little has changed since that time. Furrow's study (2012) was based in the mid-west, while mine was in Colorado, yet the findings were similar. While no participants in my study specifically mentioned safety concerns, they experienced similar scenarios in their classes as did those in Furrow's study. While transgender people are more visible on the national stage than ever before, the reality is that many people choose to stay in the closet because it is "easier." There is still a desire to hide and not risk being ostracized or seen as the other. Studies have shown that many students give up and try to remain unseen and invisible when wrestling with definitions and pronouns and constantly trying to educate people about their identity (Goldberg & Kuvalanka, 2018; Nicolazzo, 2016). And, because heteronormativity and homophobia persist (Draughn, Elkins, & Roy 2002, Iconis, 2010; Longerbeam, Inkelas, Johnson, & Lee, 2007; Rivers, 2015), there is still a large section of the population that thinks being LGB or transgender is something to make light of or make fun of and however welcoming a campus seems, the reality of what goes on inside of the classroom differs from the public image of a campus.

During this research process, several factors were surprising, but the most surprising factor was the move away from smaller class sizes for writing-intensive courses, like English Composition. This set-up is not what I have experienced and was not what I could have imagined. These classes, from my experience, thrive on personal discussions, debating topics of the day, anything from politics to religion. Students really get to know one another on a deeper level than I assume they would in a math course or science class. Additionally, the writing is often personal, whether this is in the form of a

personal narrative or a student selected topic for an argumentative research paper answering the question Should Gay Couples be Allowed to Adopt? These robust topics offer students a place to discuss and think deeply about what they actually think versus what they have been told or taught. Teaching critical and analytical thinking skills are a cornerstone of this course. The move to larger class sizes negates much of what the class is supposed to be. This alone changes the entire environment away from the intimate setting and sharing of personal writing and personal opinions. Peer-review sessions are now being conducted online and the peer-to-peer sessions are disappearing. It is much different making electronic comments on a computer to a piece of writing of a student you may or may not remember versus sitting down next to someone and discussing their work and why they made the choices, both content-wise and mechanics-wise of each paragraph. The large class sizes, some as high as 70 and 85 students, allow students to be almost invisible. How can any teacher get to know that many students, let alone read that many essays with due diligence and provide detailed writing critiques and commentary?

Based on my Guiding Research Questions, several themes emerged. When asked about heteronormativity within the composition classroom, 7 out of 11 participants acknowledged that the atmosphere was heteronormative. However, the most surprising information was the increased anonymity of many of the participants through the increased size of English Composition classes. With larger class sizes, transgender students were able to blend in more than in smaller class settings. The increase of online writing assignments and electronic peer reviews assisted in this increased anonymity. Stealth was a sub-theme which emerged, as 2 participants noted they had the ability to pass as their new gender identity, so it made it much easier to be out and more vocal in

class. In addition to how stealth participants were, some participants mentioned that a lot of their comfort depended on where they were in the transition process. I had a few participants mention not passing well and not being on hormones yet.

Another theme was the attitude of the professor. Four out of 11 participants mentioned their professor's attitude toward LGBT issues had a direct effect on how the participants would approach the class. If students felt professors were open and accepting, they were more likely to disclose being transgender. Lastly, the theme of safety and disclosure was discussed. Of the 11 participants, 4 chose not to openly disclose their transgender identity to the class. Others said they were discerning about who to disclose to and in what manner. Safety was not specifically mentioned, but several students acknowledged disparaging comments students would make about transgender individuals or if you chose to disclose, you would be "asking for trouble." So, whether it be the heteronormative atmosphere on campus and in class (Draughn, Elkins, & 2002, Iconis, 2010; Longerbeam, Inkelas, Johnson, & Lee, 2007; Rivers, 2015) or the professor's attitude about LGB and transgender issues, which ultimately sets the tone for the class (Goldberg, 2018), transgender college students still face obstacles on college campuses and within academic classrooms. I found this to be the case in my study, as well.

Recommendations for Further Research

There are several areas in which further research would be beneficial. One such research area could include looking at a more diverse sample; all but 1 of 11 participants in this study were white. Also, 10 of the 11 participants were FTM. While I thought that was interesting, it was not until I researched the statistics further to find that FTM

transgender people outnumber MTF by 3 to 1 (Kaplan, 2010). Once I learned this information, it seems that my study, while seemingly slanted toward FTM participants, was not out of the ordinary, participant-wise. Further, all participants attended college in the state of Colorado. Perhaps, looking at people who identified as gender-queer or gender-fluid could help round-out a future study. Additionally, adding transgender people of color would give new and important insights to this marginalized population. While I am confident that the experiences of the 11 individuals who participated in this study offer interesting insights and add much to the dearth of literature addressing happenings within the academic classroom, looking at other regions and states would allow a more diverse and robust narrative.

Additionally, interviewing professors about their experiences with transgender students might also provide another, much-needed perspective on what happens within a college classroom. It would be interesting to see how they navigated issues having to do with having a transgender student. Also, having the professor provide insight into how students in the class interacted with transgender students would be informative. Furthermore, asking non-LGBT professors to analyze their syllabi and reading lists, lecture notes and slides, and maybe even examples they have used in class, gender binary or other, would produce an exciting study and needed information on how professors approach this topic within their course.

I also chose not to ask about family dynamics and coming out/transition stories because I wanted to keep my focus on the classroom itself, but I think these could be valuable additions to further studies. Looking specifically at how their home lives interacted with their college lives would be an innovative way to frame this type of study.

And, I did not ask about any participants' personal lives, so maybe getting a more rounded picture of the individual as a college student in and out of the classroom could be beneficial to the research.

Another area for further research could be looking into the shift from small class sizes, capped at 20-25 students for English Composition to large theatre-type classes with 75 and 80 students. While this does not address any transgender concerns, it is an intriguing shift, and one I have not encountered in my teaching career, even within the last year in the state of Colorado, so I would be curious to read studies on this new phenomenon. Perhaps, there are other shifts happening as well in the teaching of composition classes that may also be examined.

Summary

This study focused on the experiences of transgender college students in the English Composition classroom in the Rocky Mountains. Eleven participants shared valuable information as to their lived experiences within an academic class. Each participant had a unique perspective and allowed me to tell their story to better improve the atmosphere for transgender students within the classroom setting. This research shows that transgender students continue to face challenging situations within in academic class. Most participants within this study said they chose not to discuss or divulge their transgender status to classmates due to how it would be viewed and how they would be treated. In the larger class sizes, this was possible and more comfortable for the students. The results of this study suggest there is more work to be done in making transgender students feel comfortable and equally accepted within the academic classroom.

As an instructor of composition courses, I feel it is imperative for all faculty, not only in composition, and all administrators to glean from this updated study the real experiences of transgender students in a classroom, which promotes analytical thinking skills, an open exchange of ideas, and insight about the true mix of the college population. Through this research, I was able to gain valuable information through interviews of transgender college students in the Rocky Mountains, but findings from this study can easily be adapted for other disciplines and other regions. Since the English Composition classroom is a cross-section of the college population, the results from this study can further help in making academic classrooms more accommodating and welcoming for transgender students nationwide.

APPENDIX A– IRB Approval

From: jrb@usm.edu <jrb@usm.edu>
Sent: Friday, November 9, 2018 1:53 PM
To: Lilian Hill; Tracey Williams
Subject: IRB-18-99 - Initial: Goshorn Committee Letter - Expedited



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39408-0001
Phone: 601.266.5997 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | www.usm.edu/research/institutional-review-board

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project below has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University Policy to ensure:

- The risks to subjects are minimized and reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. Problems should be reported to ORI via the Incident template on Cayuse IRB.
- The period of approval is twelve months. An application for renewal must be submitted for projects exceeding twelve months.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: IRB-18-99

PROJECT TITLE: Transgender College Students in the English Composition Classroom in the Deep South

SCHOOL/PROGRAM: School of Education, Educational Research and Admin

RESEARCHER(S): Tracey Williams
Lilian Hill

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Approved

CATEGORY: Expedited

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: November 9, 2018 to November 9, 2019

Edward L. Goshorn, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chairperson

APPENDIX B-Participant Request Letter



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

Department of Educational Research & Administration

118 College Drive #5027 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001

Phone: 601.266.4621 | Fax: 601.266.4233 | tracey.williams@usm.edu | www.usm.edu

Seeking: Research participants who identify as transgender and are currently enrolled in “Freshman Composition”/First-year Composition/Composition 101 or have completed the course within the last 2 years. Subjects should be 18 or older.

Dissertation: Transgender College Students in the English Composition Classroom in the Rocky Mountains

My name is Tracey Williams, and I am a Doctoral Candidate at The University of Southern Mississippi. I am researching the experiences of people who identify as transgender in the typical Comp. 101 class—usually a small class, where writing is shared and often personal in nature. I am focusing on the Rocky Mountains (Colorado) because this region lacks proper representation in published academic research.

I wanted to see if you could forward or share this email with your group to see if anyone wanted to share their experiences with me. My role is simply as reporter, someone to tell the stories “as is.” Or, if you know of anyone who might be interested and attends college (2 or 4-year, private or public) in Colorado, please feel free to pass this information along to them.

Interviews would be brief—roughly 20-30 minutes in length and would be conducted via webcam. Additionally, a questionnaire would be distributed through email. A follow-up interview (lasting 5-10 minutes) would be required to verify all interview notes were transcribed accurately and to see if the participant wanted to add or redact anything from the prior interview.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Tracey Williams, MA., MFA.
Doctoral Candidate (Ed.D., ABD)
Dept. of Educational Research and Administration
Tracey.williams@usm.edu

APPENDIX C-Informed Consent Form



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD STANDARD (ONLINE) INFORMED CONSENT

STANDARD (ONLINE) INFORMED CONSENT PROCEDURES

The Project Information and Research Description sections of this form should be completed by the Principal Investigator before submitting this form for IRB approval. Use what is given in the research description and consent sections below when constructing research instrument online.

Last Edited July 20th, 2017

Today's date: 10/21/18

PROJECT INFORMATION		
Project Title: Transgender College Students in the English Composition Classroom in the Rocky Mountains		
Principal Investigator: Tracey Williams	Phone: 917-857-4886	Email: tracey.williams@usm.edu
College: Education and Human Sciences	Department: Educational Research and Administration	

RESEARCH DESCRIPTION
<p>1. Purpose:</p> <p>The purpose of this qualitative study, using both queer theory and transgender theory is to examine the realities of transgender college students within an English composition classroom in the Rocky Mountains. Transgender (trans) students face unique experiences on college campuses and in academic classrooms. This study will explore the experiences of trans students and ascertain their needs within a composition class. The composition classroom offers an intimate setting, as classes are usually capped at 20-25 students. Additionally, personal writing is encouraged and expected. Within this context and setting, I feel that I will be able to gain valuable information on the accurate and authentic experiences of transgender college students. Using the geographical locale of the Rocky Mountains adds to the literature as little research has been conducted in this region about this student population. The findings of this study can be translated to other disciplines campus-wide to serve the trans college population more appropriately.</p> <p>2. Description of Study:</p> <p>I plan to conduct a qualitative research study whereby I will interview trans students about their experiences in the English Composition classroom. To locate this population of students, I plan to reach out to LGBTQ student groups on college campuses, such as LGBTQ student organizations and Gay-Straight Alliances in several southern states to find participants. I will make contact via email with faculty advisors of these groups to ask permission to solicit student participation for the project. Through this process, I hope to use snowball sampling or chain referral sampling (Birnacki & Waldorf, 1981) for gathering more participants, as I know the population I am targeting is small. My hope is to conduct interviews in-person, if it is geographically possible; otherwise, I will utilize Skype, Facetime, or other video chatting applications, as well as email to gather the needed information. As of now, I anticipate conducting between 12-24 interviews, but I am not certain about the number of participants, as I do not know when saturation will be reached.</p> <p>Interviews would be brief—roughly 20-30 minutes in length and would be conducted via webcam. Additionally, a questionnaire would be distributed through email. A follow-up interview (lasting 5-10 minutes) would be required to verify all interview notes were transcribed accurately and to see if the participant wanted to add or redact anything from the prior interview.</p>

APPENDIX D– Interview Questions

DISSERTATION TITLE: Transgender College Students in the English Composition Classroom in the Rocky Mountains

Research Questionnaire

How old are you?

Do you identify as transgender?

Where do you attend college?

Are you currently enrolled in English Composition?

*Or, did you take it in the last 2 years?

How many students are/were in your class?

How would you describe your experiences within the class?

What, if any, influence does/did the presumed atmosphere of heteronormativity (the assumption that everyone is straight unless stated otherwise) have on your experiences in the course?

Do/Did you feel comfortable disclosing your trans identity? Why/why not?

How safe do/did you feel discussing your personal life?

Anything else you would like to add?

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