

The Experiences of Trans Students Today: What We Know and Do Not Know (But Should)

Genny Beemyn, Ph.D.

**Director, Stonewall Center
UMass Amherst**

**Coordinator, Campus Pride's
Trans Policy Clearinghouse**

pronouns: they/them

So you can remember
hundreds of Pokémon
names



...but somehow, my pronouns
and gender identity
are "too complicated"?

Sophie Labelle, Assigned Male Comics

Research Possibilities

National Surveys of College Students Adding a Question(s) on Gender Identity:

- Multi-Institutional Study of Leadership (MISL) in 2006 (with expanded options in 2009, 2015, and 2018)
 - American College Health Association's National College Health Assessment in 2008 (with expanded options in 2016)
 - National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) in 2014
 - Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey in 2015
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Research Possibilities

National Surveys of Trans People:

- *National Transgender Discrimination Survey, 2011*
National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) and the National LGBTQ Task Force ($n = 6,456$)
- *U.S. Transgender Survey, 2015*
NCTE ($n = 27,715$)

The most difficult part about being trans isn't being trans itself, which is actually pretty **AWESOME** in my opinion, but having to deal with everything society puts trans people through just to humiliate them.



Sophie Labelle, Assigned Male Comics

What We (Sort of) Know

- How many college students are trans?
 - How do they compare to cis students as they enter college? After their first year? As seniors?
 - How do their experiences with sexual harassment and assault compare to cis students?
 - To what extent do they experience discrimination and what are the effects?
 - How does their mental health compare to cis students?
 - How do the trans students who succeed in college do so?
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What Percent of College Students Are Trans?

1%

3%

6%

12%

2.7 %

From the American College Health Association's *National College Health Assessment*, Fall 2017 ($n = 26,000+$) includes students who indicated that they are trans (1.6%) and students whose sex assigned at birth does not match their gender identity (1.1%)

UCLA Williams Institute: .6% of adults, .7% of 13-17 year olds

What Were the Most Common Trans Identities?

Genderqueer	.6% (<i>n</i> = 113)
Trans man	.2% (47)
Trans woman	.1% (16)
Another identity	1% (192)

SERU 2017 (2.1% trans):

.7% genderqueer/gender nonconforming

.7% trans man

.6% another gender identity

.1% trans woman

Identifying as trans (1.9%) on the *National College Health Assessment*, Fall 2018

2016 NCHA (1.8% trans):

.9% “another identity,” .6% genderqueer, .1% trans man: .1% trans woman

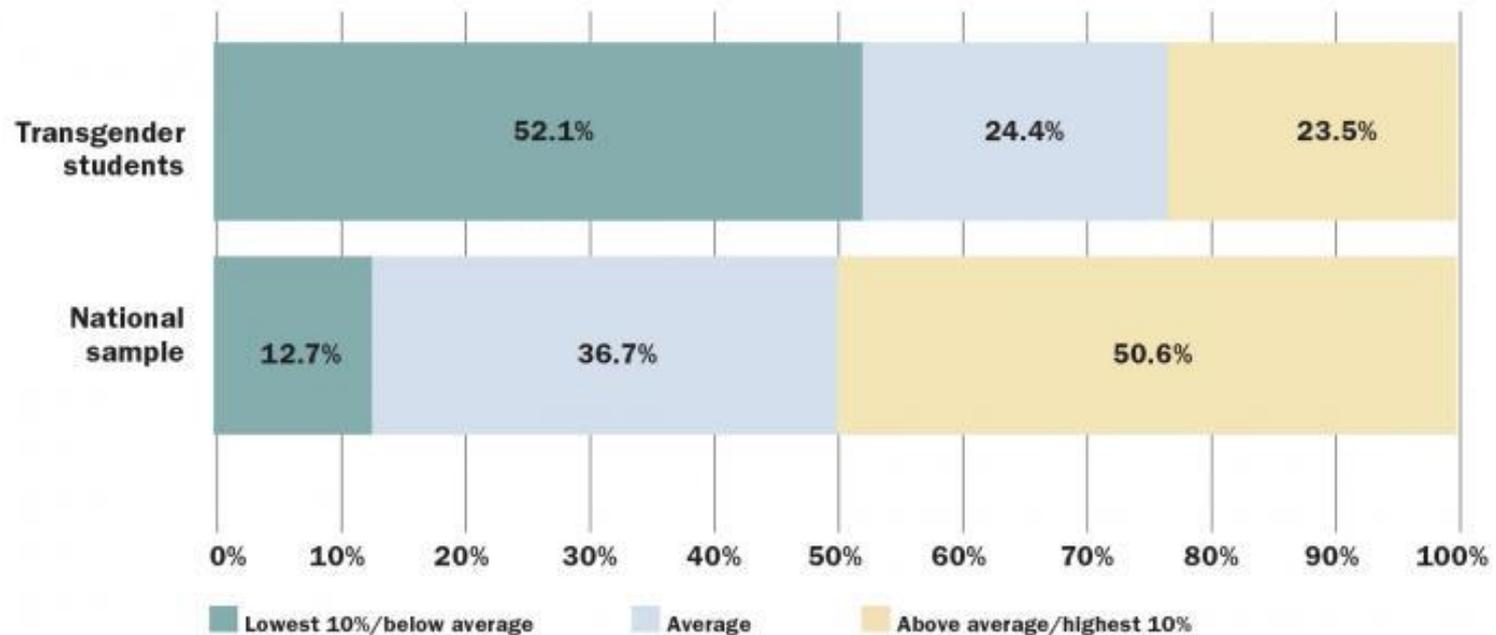
Research on Incoming Trans Students

- Nearly 19% of incoming trans students reported major concerns about financing their college education, as compared to 12% of the overall sample.
- 47% of trans students indicated feeling depressed frequently, as compared to less than 10% of the overall sample.
- 55% of trans students reported feeling overwhelmed in the year prior to college, versus 34% of the overall sample.
- 48% overall anticipated seeking counseling during college, while nearly 75% of trans students did.

Source: Ellen Bara Stolzenberg and Bryce Hughes, "The Experiences of Incoming Transgender College Students: New Data on Gender Identity," *Liberal Education* 103, no.3 (2017). Used Fall 2015 CIRP data

Research on Incoming Trans Students

Figure 1. Students' self-rated emotional health



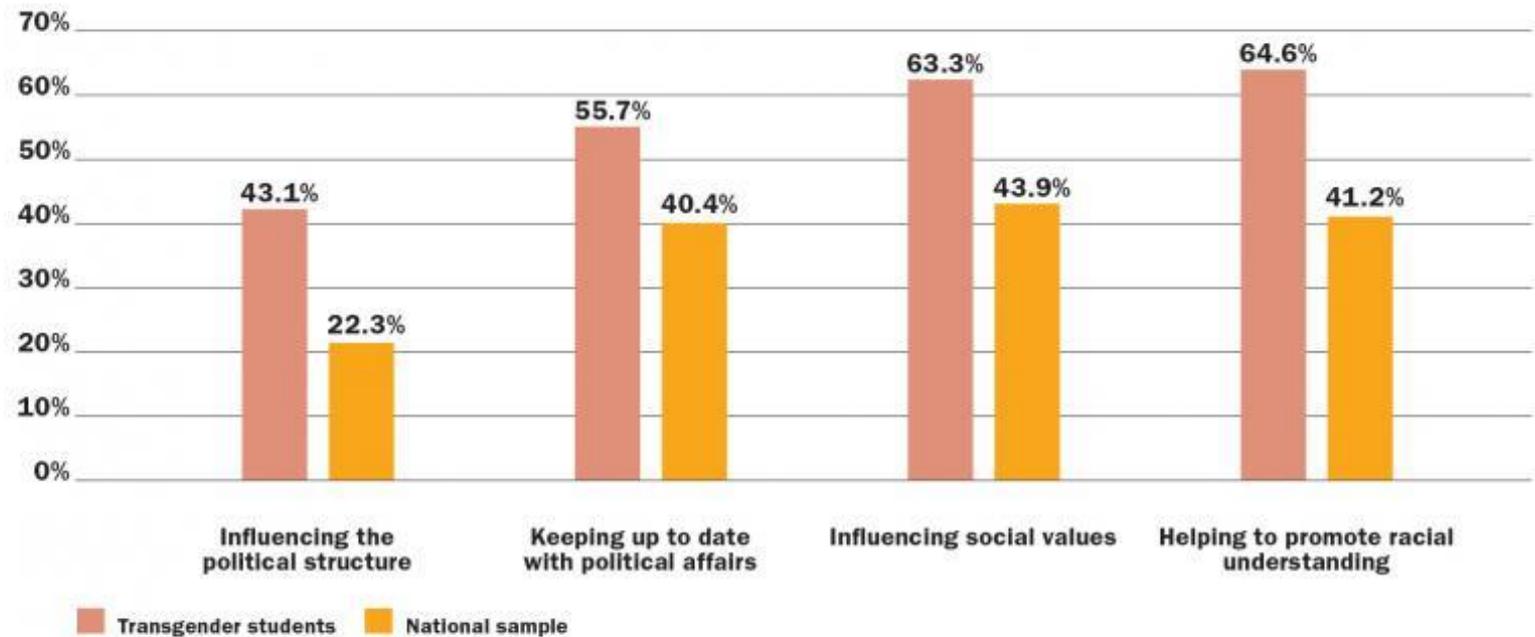
Research on Incoming Trans Students

- Almost 54% of trans students had a high school GPA of A- or higher, as did about 59% of all students surveyed.
- About 47% of trans students reported having engaged in some type of activism within the year prior to college, which is more than double the percentage of students in the overall sample (21%).
- 43% of trans students indicated that they frequently share their opinions on important causes, versus 15% of the overall sample.
- About 48% of trans students scored high on civic engagement, as compared to about 23% of the overall sample.

Source: Ellen Bara Stolzenberg and Bryce Hughes, "The Experiences of Incoming Transgender College Students: New Data on Gender Identity," *Liberal Education* 103, no.3 (2017). Used Fall 2015 CIRP data

Research on Incoming Trans Students

Figure 3. Students' personal goals as shown by percentages indicating "very important" or "essential" for each



Research on First-Year Trans Students

- Trans students are less likely to report “high quality” interactions with students services staff and with administrative staff and offices than cis students.
- Trans students felt that they received less institutional support than their cis peers for:
 - Attending events that address important social, economic, or political issues
 - Using learning support services
 - Attending campus activities and events
 - Providing opportunities to be involved socially
 - Encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds
 - Providing support to help students succeed academically
 - Providing support for your overall well-being
 - Helping you manage your non-academic responsibilities

Source: NSSE, Annual Results, 2017

Research on Senior Trans Students

Major by Gender Identity

	Woman	Man	Another Id
Arts & Humanities	10%	8%	22%
Social Sciences	14%	9%	15%
STEM	6%	25%	22%
Business	15%	21%	10%
Health	19%	8%	3%

Source: NSSE, Annual Results, 2017

Research on Violence Against Trans Students

Report on the AAU Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct

2015

“In four years of college, more than one-fourth of undergraduate women at a large group of leading universities said they had been sexually assaulted by force or when they were incapacitated” (*New York Times*, 9/21/15).

“Transgender students and others who do not identify as either male or female had higher rates of assault than women. Experts said this was the first large-scale study they knew of to measure the extent of the problem for transgender students.”

Research on Violence Against Trans Students

- 75.2% of TGQN* undergrads had experienced sexual harassment, as compared to 61.9% of cis female undergrads.
- 39.1% of TGQN seniors reported experiencing nonconsensual sexual contact at least once during their time at college, as compared to 33.1% of senior cis women.
- Only 15% of TGQN students reported an incident of sexual harassment to campus authorities.

Source: Report on the AAU Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct, 2015

* “transgender, genderqueer or nonconforming, questioning, or not listed” (n = 1,398)

Research on Violence Against Trans Students

TGQN* students were the least optimistic that:

- Other students would support the person making the report
- Campus officials would take the report seriously
- Campus official would protect the safety of the person making the report
- Campus officials would conduct a fair investigation
- Campus officials would take action against the offender(s)
- Campus officials would take action to address factors that may have led to the sexual assault or sexual misconduct.

And were the most likely to believe that the alleged offender(s) or their associates would retaliate against the person making the report.

* “transgender, genderqueer or nonconforming, questioning, or not listed” (n = 1,398)

Research on Violence Against Trans Students

Trans students ($n = 204$), as compared to cis female and cis male students, reported significantly greater rates in the past 12 months of:

- **partner violence:** emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and stalking
- **sexual violence:** sexual touching without consent, attempted sexual penetration, and sexual penetration
- **physical violence:** physical assault and being verbally threatened

Source: Stacey B. Griner, et al., "The Intersection of Gender Identity and Violence: Victimization Experienced by Transgender College Students," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (2017). Used three years of data from the ACHA's National College Health Assessment.

Research on Discrimination Against Trans Students

- 46% of the respondents to the U.S. Trans Survey ($n = 27,715$) said that people thought or knew that they were trans in college.
- 24% of respondents who were out or thought of as trans were verbally, physically, or sexually harassed on campus.
- 16% of these students left college because of the harassment, which represented 2% of all of the respondents who had attended a college.
- Trans people of color, specifically American Indian, Latinx, Black, and multiracial individuals, were more likely than white people to report leaving college because of harassment.

Source: Sandy E. James, et al., *The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey* (Washington, DC: National Center for Transgender Equality, 2016).

Research on Discrimination Against Trans Students

National college student surveys show that trans students are significantly more likely than cis students, including cis LGBTQ+ students, to indicate:

- experiencing their campus as a discriminatory environment
- seeing their campus as having a negative climate
- having a lower sense of belonging within their campus community
- For example, less than two-thirds of trans students report a sense of belonging on their campus, compared with 82% of cis students and about three-fourths of LGBTQ+ students.

finn j. schneider, Qui D. Alexander, and Tania D. Mitchell,
“Necessary Yet Insufficient: Contextualizing Trans* Identities in
Campus Climate Research,” in *Evaluating Campus Climate at U.S.
Research Universities: Opportunities for Diversity and Inclusion*,
edited by Krista M. Soria, 2018

Effects of Discrimination on Trans Students

- Research has consistently shown that students of various identities who have a **lower sense of belonging** are less likely to succeed academically and remain enrolled in college (Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods 2007; Strayhorn 2012; Terenzini and Pascarella 1977; Tinto 1987, 1993).
- Students who perceive their **campus climate as more negative** are more academically disengaged and experience greater rates of depression and substance use. They have lower grade point averages, lower ratings of their academic knowledge and skills, and lower progress toward degree completion than students who report a more positive campus experience (Cress 2008).

Effects of Discrimination on Trans Students

- Trans individuals who reported being denied access to a campus bathroom because of their gender identity were 1.45 times as likely than those who had not to have attempted suicide at some point.
- Trans individuals who reported being denied access to gender-appropriate campus housing because of their gender identity were 1.64 times as likely to have attempted suicide at some point.
- Trans individuals who reported experiencing anti-trans harassment, physical assault, or sexual assault were 1.36 times as likely.

Source: Kristie L. Seelman, “Transgender Adults’ Access to College Bathrooms and Housing and the Relationship to Suicidality,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 63, no. 10 (2016), 1378–1399. Based on a secondary analysis of data from the National Transgender Discrimination Survey (2011). Note: people were not asked when they attempted suicide, so causality cannot be inferred.

Effects of Discrimination on Trans Students

- 32% of trans students and 30% of LGBTQ+ students reported being so depressed that it was difficult to function, twice the percentage reported by cis and heterosexual students.
- 20% of trans students and 17% of LGBTQ+ students reported self-injury in the last 12 months, which was three times the rate of their cis and heterosexual peers.
- 25% of trans students and 22% of LGBTQ+ students reported that they had seriously considered suicide during the previous 12 months, which was three times the rate of cis (9%) and heterosexual (8%) students.

Meta-analysis of data from the National College Health Assessment, the National Survey of Student Engagement, the Cooperative Institutional Research Program, and the Student Experience in the Research University Consortium (involved 900+ colleges and nearly 90,000 LGBTQ+ students)

Resilience and Persistence of Trans Students

Resilience, as measured through a scale evaluating a person's ability to recover from stressful situations, has been found to:

- ✓ help buffer against the effects of anti-LGBTQ+ institutional and individual discrimination
- ✓ is associated with less reported depression and suicidal behavior among LGBTQ+ students (Woodford et al. 2018).

What fosters self-esteem and resilience? Connection

Trans students are better able to navigate genderism and develop a sense of belonging through creating kinship networks

Z Nicolazzo, et al., "An Exploration of Trans* Kinship as a Strategy for Student Success," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 30, no. 3 (2017), 305-319.

Resilience and Persistence of Trans Students

Sites where trans kinship develops:

- **Material Domain:** physical spaces on campus and locally
- **Virtual Domain:** online spaces, which are especially important if there are not physical, on-campus spaces
- **Affective Domain:** individuals' support systems

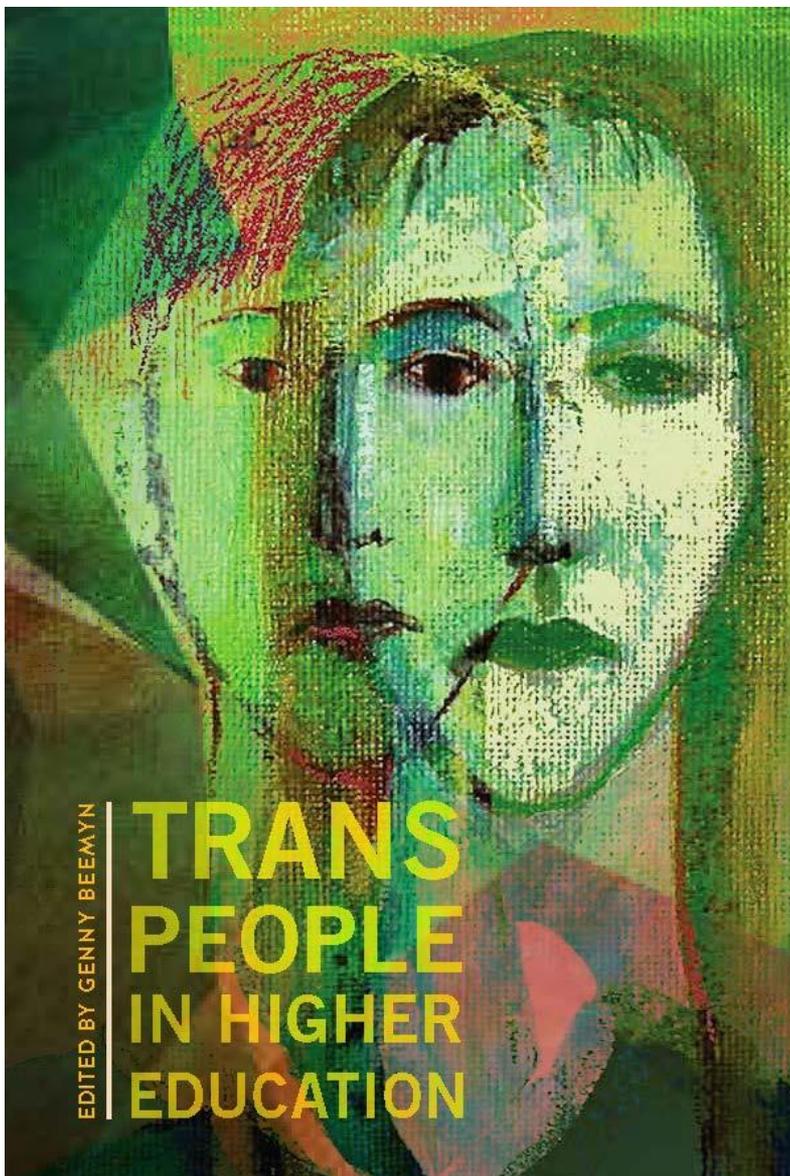
How faculty and staff can help foster trans student kinship:

- Assist trans students in connecting with other trans people in both the physical and virtual world
- Support the development of formal and informal trans-affirming spaces, such as LGBTQ+ and trans-specific student groups and an LGBTQ+ center
- Seek the input of trans students on how they are affected by various campus environments and work with them to change unsupportive spaces

*Trans People in
Higher Education*

Genny Beemyn

SUNY Press, 2019



Cover image by Yulonda Rios

College Students with Nonbinary Sexual and/or Gender Identities

- ▶ 360 students, ages 17-25, from 199 colleges completed a survey; 208 students (84 colleges) did a follow-up interview
- ▶ 111 of the 208 identified outside of a gender binary, including genderqueer, agender, gender fluid, nonbinary trans, demigender, and androgynous students
- ▶ 102 of the 111 also identified outside of a sexual binary
- ▶ Average age at which they began using their current gender identity label: 19 years old (17.5 years old for sexual identity)
- ▶ 91 of the 111 use gender-inclusive pronouns for themselves; most (91%) use “they/them/their”

Being Out to a Parent(s)

- ▶ 51% of the nonbinary gender students were out or mostly out to at least one parent (58% of the students of color).
- ▶ 70% of the cis students were out or mostly out about their nonbinary sexual identity to at least one parent (48% of the students of color).
- ▶ Of the 99 students who identified outside of both sexual and gender binaries and who discussed their family:
 - Half were out or mostly out to at least one parent about both
 - A third were out about their sexual identity but not their gender
 - Only 2 people were out about their gender but not their sexuality

Being Out to a Parent(s)

- ❑ In cases where there was a difference in parental acceptance for the student's sexual and gender identities, sexual identity was almost always more accepted.
- ▶ Why the students were not out to a parent(s):
 - ❑ a parent(s) holds anti-LGBTQA+ attitudes
 - ❑ a parent(s) has conservative religious beliefs
 - ❑ a parent(s) comes from a culture that is intolerant toward LGBTQA+ people
 - ❑ believe that a parent(s) would not get or not take their identity seriously
 - ❑ think that a parent(s) would be uncomfortable with their identity

Being Out to a Parent(s)

Out to at least one parent:

- 89 students with nonbinary sexual identity/binary gender
- 57 students with nonbinary gender identity

How they characterized their parents' level of support:

- supportive or very supportive: 45% sexuality; 40% gender
- do not completely get or are uncomfortable: 11%; 32%
- unsupportive or completely intolerant: 17%; 15%
- OK but not great: 14%; 5%
- ignore the issue and will not discuss it: 1%; 5%

Learning about Their Identities

- ▶ Where they first learned about their gender and/or sexual identity (could provide more than one answer):

	Nonbinary Gender	Nonbinary Sexuality/Binary Gender
Online:	68%	48%
Met People:	33%	14%
Friends:	20%	28%

Learning about Their Identities

- Individuals with less visible nonbinary identities, like asexual, agender, and demigender, were much more likely to learn the terms online, typically on Tumblr (79% of nonbinary trans students who specified a website cited Tumblr).
- The students who had adopted terminology that, at least as of now, is not widely known even among trans people (e.g. condigirl) invariably learned it online.



Support for Their Identities

- Where respondents received support for their gender and sexual identities (could provide more than one answer):

	Nonbinary Gender	Nonbinary Sexuality/Binary Gender
Friends:	82%	75%
LGBTQ+ Groups	41%	37%
Online:	32%	27%
LGBTQ+ Center:	20%	35%
Partner or Ex:	20%	20%
Family:	13%	22%

- faculty member: 7%; staff member (beyond LGBTQ+ center): 2%

What We Do Not Know

- Experiences by different gender identities and by other identity differences (race, country, family experience with college, sexual orientation, etc.)
 - Out versus non-out trans students, undergrad versus grad trans students
 - Experiences at different types of colleges and in different campus environments
 - Experiences in the classroom and in different academic majors
 - How discrimination affects GPA, family financial aid, and persistence
 - What factors best contribute to trans student success and retention
 - Numbers, numbers, numbers
 - Anything about trans staff and faculty
- 

Questions?

Also feel free to
email me:
genny@umass.edu

