

DISSERTATION

I LOVE THE WORK, BUT THE WORK DOESN'T LOVE ME: A CONSTRUCTIVIST
STUDY ON THE STORIES AND LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TRANSGENDER STAFF OF
COLOR WHO REPORT DISCRIMINATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Submitted by

Bri Carmen Sérrano

School of Education

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Doctoral Committee:

Advisor: Kari Dockendorff

Susana Muñoz

Carmen Rivera

Maricela DeMirjyn

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ABSTRACT

I LOVE THE WORK, BUT THE WORK DOESN'T LOVE ME: A CONSTRUCTIVIST STUDY ON THE STORIES AND LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TRANSGENDER STAFF OF COLOR WHO REPORT DISCRIMINATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Transgender people in the United States are experiencing an unprecedented amount of anti-trans laws and rhetoric (Yurcaba, 2024). Simultaneously, there is limited research on the experiences of transgender staff of color in higher education and their experiences of reporting discrimination (Pitcher, 2017; Siegel, 2019). Therefore, a study focusing on the lived experiences of trans staff of color who report discrimination is timely and necessary to inform how colonial institutions confront discrimination reporting and processes. The centering of marginalized people is essential to understanding the experiences trans staff of color have with the processes and practices of institutions receiving discrimination reports, which not only reflect their experiences but also the experiences of other transgender people in higher education.

The study uses a constructivist qualitative (Merriam, 2014) research methodology and implements the decoloniality for a trans* of color critique (Salas-SantaCruz, 2021) framework to analyze findings. The findings reveal five themes of the lived experiences of transgender staff of color and coloniality: white cissexist capitalism and normative violence, white cissexist imperialism in higher education, psychological demotion and policing of transgender bodies, inconsistency, and dismissiveness of reports of discrimination, and institutional negligence and reconciling emotions after reporting discrimination. Continued research on the experiences of transgender staff of color in higher education is needed, as critiques and understandings of non-

discrimination policies and practices and addressing the incompetence of administrative leaders and supervisors in higher education inadequately meeting the needs of transgender staff of color to meet their basic position duties. Higher education institutions, administrators, and policymakers need to take immediate action to humanize, empathize, and identify the next steps in ensuring transgender staff of color are not violently dehumanized in the workplace.

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DEDICATION

For My Ancestors: Grandpa and Grandma and Transcetors,

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For me

I am me. I am whole. I am worthy. I am existing. I am here. I am not going anywhere.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The irony, oh the irony. In the Spring of 2015, I received a phone call that would forever change my career. Little did I know the phone call would begin a chapter of my life with trauma that would be everlasting and that I would learn from always. The call was from the person I would later come to know as my oppressor, my superior, and my abuser, whom I will call Karen. Karen called me on my office number to inquire about my interest in applying for a position open nearby at a local university. I was interested in the position since I had been in a contract position that would not be renewed in any upcoming fiscal year. I applied and felt I was being groomed to take on the position in Karen's stead and she would mentor me if I took on the position. I was offered the position, dwelled in the honeymoon stage of a new job, and felt I was at an excellent point in my professional career. Until... Karen became jealous and controlling and began to put her insecurities on full display.

The State of Anti-Transness in the United States Laws and Policies

As of April 2024, there have been thirty-eight states that have severely restricted the ability of transgender people to access gender-affirming healthcare, gender affirming restrooms and are considering enacting anti-trans legislation (Trans Legislation Tracker, 2024). I used *trans* and *transgender* throughout the study for consistency and accessibility. Twenty-five states have banned trans-student-athletes from participating on teams that affirm their gender identity, and there have been at least ten states that have banned people from using the restroom that aligns with their gender identity (Yurcaba, 2024). In 2023, over 537 anti-trans laws were being considered and implemented, and 83 proposed statutes became law across the United States (Trans Legislation Tracker, 2023). Most recently, one of the most extreme laws has gone to the desk of the governor in the state of Kentucky, which includes banning gender-affirming care for people under 18 years old, as well as banning the use of gendered facilities at schools that do not correspond with the student's biological sex (S.B. 150, 2023) and bans any use of pronouns different from those corresponding with biological sex of the child.

Additionally, some laws are being proposed and passed which ban *transgender* people from using public restrooms in the presence of minors. *Transgender* is defined as someone whose gender identity does not match the sex-assigned-at-birth and goes beyond one gender, and it is argued the term does not encompass all different gender identities under the umbrella term transgender (James et al., 2016; Velasco, 2022). Throughout the dissertation, I used *trans* and *transgender* with the same meaning, as *trans* is a shortened version of the term transgender. For example, Stryker (2018) notes gender is an expansive experience that may not be captured in the same way for all people; therefore, it is difficult to have one term to describe an entire population of people.

The second chapter provides a more expansive definition of *transgender* and defines other italicized terms that are important to this dissertation study. Some United States laws seek to ban anyone appearing to be gender non-conforming in public under the guise of a ‘ban drag’ law, such as the one in Tennessee, which had a law in place law which bans drag shows (S.B. 3, 2023). The proposed and implemented anti-trans laws across the United States pose a threat to the lives of transgender people’s survival, healthcare, and basic needs and overall threaten their mere existence both inside and outside of higher education. For example, the state of Florida has banned the use of restrooms by people unless the bathroom correlates with their sex-assigned-at-birth. If someone is suspected of being trans in a restroom, they can be subject to genital examination or DNA testing (H.B. 1521).

Given the climate for transgender people of color in the United States, a study focused on the stories and lived experiences of transgender staff of color in higher education reporting discrimination is significant. At this time of this publication, legal precedents threatened the physical and psychological safety of transgender people, which will undoubtedly create negative

stigmas in higher education for transgender staff of color, which can lead to discrimination. The hostile climate of anti-trans laws and sentiment sweeping across the United States is irrevocably tied to my research and co-creators in this dissertation study.

My Journey

Throughout this dissertation study, I engaged with vulnerability and authenticity to provide context to my journey and lived experience, which has informed my desire to conduct this study about the lived experience of transgender staff of color reporting discrimination in higher education. At the beginning of each chapter of this dissertation, I provide short personal narrative stories relevant to the research, which complements the intimate look into my positionality and own process of conducting this research that is so relevant to my own experience. The short personal stories show my emotions, anxieties, and thoughts as I journeyed through the process of reporting a cisgender queer white woman for discriminating against me in the workplace and as I reflected upon the engagement with this study. The excerpts from my experience show how I felt and navigated reporting discrimination in higher education as a transgender staff of color. I begin with an insight into my anxieties and feelings while experiencing one of the most challenging moments in my career at a regional comprehensive public institution:

Spring 2016: I lay awake in my bed with anxiety and frustration, knowing about the meeting that would come today. I wondered how to articulate my pain, frustration, and oppression from my white cisgender woman supervisor. She continually gaslights me, questions my intentions, and reminds me that she disapproves of how I engage in my professional role. In the morning after waking up from a restless night, before heading out, I take my Alprazolam that will calm me, make me think slower, and medicate my trauma before being at work in a dehumanizing system that will never love someone like me.

The quote above illustrates a snapshot of my experience reporting discrimination as an *out* transgender staff member that caused me to file a complaint against my supervisor. Each chapter

of this dissertation includes snapshots of my own lived experience to provide contextual understanding of my own narrative and professional experience reporting discrimination based on gender identity as a transgender staff of color in higher education.

Trans people experience a disproportionate amount of discrimination in the workplace compared to their *cisgender* counterparts (James et al., 2016; Irwin, 2002). *Cisgender* (Stryker, 2018) is a term used to describe a person who experiences the same gender they were assigned at birth or given by society based on their assigned sex. Research (Irwin, 2002) shows an example of the disproportionate amount of discrimination transgender people face in the workplace: one in five transgender people report discrimination, and up to 75% experience discrimination at work. Given the disparities trans people experience compared to cisgender people in the workplace, this research is timely and necessary. There is limited research focusing on the experiences of transgender staff in higher education (Pitcher, 2017; Siegel, 2019).

Qualitative research provides the opportunity to focus on the stories of the people being studied. The methodology seeks to bring people at the margins of lived experiences to the forefront of knowledge creation (Kim, 2016). Therefore, a qualitative study centered on the experiences of transgender staff of color by a transgender scholar of color who is also a staff member in higher education contributes greatly to the conversation about transgender people in workplace contexts.

Trans people have always existed throughout humankind (Driskill, 2016). The year 2023 was the deadliest in recent history for transgender people, with over 320 transgender people being killed (Wareham, 2023). Higher education is notorious for *transmisogyny*, the *killability* of trans feminine people, and subjugating transgender people to hegemonic colonial norms of gender (Nicolazzo, 2021a; Dockendorff, 2019). While there are multiple studies in higher

education which describe the experiences of transgender students (Nicolazzo, 2016; Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017; Rankin et al., 2010), there is limited research in the field of higher education that specifically focuses on the experiences of trans staff (Simmons, 2016; Pitcher, 2018).

However, research indicates clear evidence that transgender employees experience discrimination in organizations (Rudin et al., 2014; Ruggs et al., 2015; Spade, 2015), and higher education is likely no different.

Often, the research on transgender people reporting and experiencing discrimination is published within journals focused on the experiences of trans employees in organizations and companies in general but not specifically in higher education (Siegel, 2019; Gut et al., 2018; Reed et al., 2015; Beauregard et al., 2019). Transgender employees experience a disproportionate amount of discrimination by coworkers, supervisors, and other people within their organizations due to transgender oppression, stereotypes of transgender people, lack of awareness about trans people, and ineffective organizational policies (Gallagher & Bodenhausen, 2021; Minkin & Brown, 2021; Dass & Parker, 1999). Ahmed (2021) described the challenges faced by staff and faculty who experience and report discrimination in higher education, including the fear of retaliation and the requirement to retell their trauma to prove their experiences of discrimination are valid to their Title IX offices. People who experience discrimination must prove their experiences meet the legal definition and threshold of discrimination and that their perpetrators violated non-discrimination policies (Ahmed, 2021). Therefore, the exacerbating experiences of re-traumatization by reporting discrimination can affect transgender people both emotionally and psychologically, leading to feeling less of a sense of belonging in the workplace and detrimental health effects (Ahmed, 2021). Higher education institutions, policymakers, and administrators must listen to trans staff, adhere to their needs, and

prevent more administrative violence from occurring. In this study, I ask, *what are the stories and lived experiences of transgender staff of color who report discrimination in higher education?*

Purpose of this Qualitative Study

The purpose of this study was to shine a light on the experiences of reporting discrimination by transgender staff of color. While there is a need to reform policies and processes of reporting discrimination, research is needed in the field of higher education to understand how trans people experience reporting discrimination and their lived experiences at their institutions of employment. Additionally, since there is limited research on the experiences of transgender staff and faculty (Pitcher, 2017; Siegel, 2019), there is a need to interrogate the notions of coloniality and whiteness in the experiences of the experiences of Black, brown, and Indigenous staff in higher education.

A qualitative study that centers the voices of is essential given that there is current immediate life and death circumstances that transgender people in the United States face due to neoliberal politics and dog-whistling (Haney López, 2015) rhetoric in the current political climate of 2024. The year 2023 saw a record-breaking amount of anti-trans legislation in the United States (American Civil Liberties Union, 2023). By the end of March 2024, there were 16 anti-trans bills passed across the country in 2024, which included regulation of public restroom usage, banning the use of correct pronouns and names, forcing the outing of transgender children to parents, and blocking gender-affirming healthcare for transgender adults (American Civil Liberties Union, 2023; Trans Legislation, 2024). Institutions consistently fail to make research and empirical data-informed policy decisions on diversity, equity, and justice that indiscriminately impact marginalized people (Patton et al., 2019).

This dissertation study examined the experiences of transgender staff of color who reported discrimination and their lived experiences. In turn, as a researcher, I provide discussion upon the theoretical and practical implications in higher education on the climate of reporting discrimination of transgender staff of color, the persistence of colonialism in experiences of transgender staff of color in higher education, and the need to re-examine reporting protocols of discrimination at higher education institutions.

Qualitative studies focus on storytelling, center the lived experiences of participants, and provide a more humanistic approach to participants who may be marginalized (Kim, 2016; Merriam, 2014). The vulnerability of qualitative studies requires both researcher and participant to form an intimate relationship and space for vulnerability throughout a series of interviews to build trust (Tierney, 1998). Therefore, the research question used provides transgender staff the opportunity to describe their experiences of reported discrimination at their institution. This provided higher education leaders—including policymakers and administrators—with a better understanding of what causes trans staff to report discrimination, the experience of the process of reporting discrimination, and what the climate of reporting discrimination is like for transgender staff in higher education.

The research question in this study was:

RQ: What are the stories and lived experiences of transgender staff of color who report discrimination in higher education?

Significance of the Study

This study was conducted and centered by and with transgender staff of color. Drawing from the theoretical framework used in this study Salas-SantaCruz (2021), the study reaffirmed the need for trans researchers of color to conduct research with transgender people of color in

education due to the colonality and white supremacy of white trans studies and the limitations of cisgender queer people of color due to positionality and framework. Therefore, this study is significant for administrators, policymakers, and people who seek to understand transgender people of color in higher education to truly delve into the lived experience of transgender staff of color.

Research (Dirks, 2016) shows nondiscrimination policies do not protect transgender staff of color from violence and cisnormative terrorism. Multiple studies discuss why cisgender women report discrimination, but there is a lack of information on why transgender staff in higher education report discrimination, which invisibilizes trans people's experiences (Yu & Lee, 2020; Yu & Lee, 2021). Given the rampant increased violence against transgender people (Robinson & Cooper, 2023), defunding of diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education (Bryant & Appleby, 2024), and continual rise of anti-trans laws in the United States (Ramirez, 2024), it is necessary to understand the experiences of trans staff of color in higher education as it is essential the future of higher education policies and practices as due to the escalation of targeting of trans people in the U.S.

The findings of this study dismantle institutional and administrative violence that traumatizes transgender people in higher education, which is justified due to inhumane policies that are created by colonial structures of gender (Spade, 2015). As the conceptual framework outlines, white transgender studies do little to describe the foundational challenges experienced by Black, Indigenous, and other people of color who are trans while considering gender identity as a singular experience (Salas-SantaCruz, 2021). This research aids in the dismantling of white cisnormative *heterogenderism* and colonality of gender (Salas-SantaCruz, 2021) by providing incontrovertible evidence of the explicit and implicit violence experienced in discrimination

reporting processes and their lived experiences as transgender staff of color in higher education. This study interrogated the juxtaposition of a transgender staff of color in higher education reporting discrimination while institutions publicly tout their supposed values of diversity and inclusion.

The data produced from this dissertation research critiques policy development, the reporting processes for people who report discrimination, and the perpetuation of white supremacy among institutions that create administrative violence against trans people. It is a call to end the literal and figurative killing of trans people of color by institutions, specifically in higher education. At times, the discussion of policies and documentation of the “protection” of trans people in higher education is enough to attempt to cease safety concerns (Dirks, 2016). However, as Ahmed (2007) described,

If we consider the politics of documenting diversity, we can see that documents create fantasy images of the organizations they apparently describe. The document says, ‘we are diverse’, as if saying it makes it so...practitioners can use the documents to ‘show’ the gap between what organizations ‘do do’ and what they ‘say they do’ or even how they appear. (p. 606-607)

For example, suppose a Title IX office at a university states the importance of equity in the workplace and disavows any discriminatory behavior at the organization, yet the protocol in place still does more harm to the person reporting discrimination than addressing the initial harm. In that case, transgender staff of color need to experience the actual affirmative outcomes and legitimate protection that policies are supposed to provide. As Ahmed (2007) describes, policy changes cannot happen without a better understanding of the experiences. Therefore, a

trans-informed and centered study focusing on the reporting of discrimination is essential for policy decisions.

Summary

In this study, I engaged with the participants, whom I am calling co-creators since they are creating knowledge along with me as a researcher about their stories of reporting discrimination in higher education. In this qualitative study, I conducted multiple interviews with each participant to build intimacy and vulnerability between myself and the co-creators. The lack of research on transgender staff in higher education leads to cisnormative research that can only perpetuate the dehumanization of transgender people.

The literature review defines the terms used throughout the study and concepts relevant to the research. It also provides insight into research on the experiences of transgender people in the workplace, transgender people in higher education, the experiences of staff and faculty reporting discrimination in higher education, and how higher education attempts to address discrimination.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In spring 2019-I head to my one-on-one with my supervisor and know that she may not be the most affirming cisgender straight woman due to her (assumed) faith as an Evangelical Christian. I also recall her telling me I “do not look masculine” to her as if I were seeking her approval (personal communication, T.H., 2019). I told her that I recently started taking testosterone and that I might be experiencing some side effects at work and to be patient if I experience hot flashes or seem short in conversation. She asked me, “What are the physical side effects of this to like-down there??” (personal communication, T.H., 2019). I was at a loss for words and felt the need to explain the potential side effects since I was the person who did education on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) identities on campus. At what point should I remove myself, and at what expense did she need to learn? I shared this experience while exiting the institution with the Title IX Coordinator, who had only taken notes with no concern. If I was a cisgender hetero woman with a cisgender man supervising me, asking about my breasts, would that have been taken more seriously? This is a part of my story in considering how discrimination takes shape for people like myself in higher education.

Transgender Discrimination in the Workplace and Higher Education

While my research focuses on the stories of trans staff of color who report discrimination in higher education, there is limited research on the experiences of transgender staff in higher education overall, and a stark need for research on trans faculty and staff in higher education (Pitcher, 2017; Siegel, 2019). This chapter provides context and understanding of the experiences of transgender people in the workplace, the experience of reporting discrimination by people in higher education, the causes of discrimination against transgender people, experiences of trans people of color in higher education, anti-Blackness in higher education, and how both organizations and higher education attempt to tackle discrimination against marginalized people through diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. Lastly, a review of the conceptual framework used in the study, Salas-SantaCruz’s (2021) decoloniality for a trans* of color educational criticism, is included.

Focus on Gender Identity, Race, and Ethnicity

This study focuses on discrimination experienced by the co-creators, such as gender and racial identity in higher education. While it specifically focuses on gender identity, race, and ethnicity to center transgender people of color because of my own lived experiences and the nuances necessary for studying trans people in education (Salas-SantaCruz, 2021), co-creators also disclosed other salient identities to their experiences such as immigration status, disabilities, and gender expression. In the following section, definition of key terms included in the study and concepts that arose from interviews with co-creators, including terms related to gender, race, and ethnicity are explained.

Use of Terms

Due to the ever-changing definitions of words and concepts used to describe gender identity, gender expression, and trans people, clarifying terms is crucial. Each term defined is used by either the co-creators or me as the researcher and is provided in the literature to guide the reader. The list is not a comprehensive glossary of the terms used by all transgender people or people of color. However, the terms provided are key terms and used throughout the study.

Key terms are used by the co-creators when describing themselves and their own lived experiences, as well as in the study's methodology. While identities are socially constructed, honoring people's existence and uniqueness is important in qualitative studies (Merriam, 2014), especially among marginalized communities. Co-creators described their own gender identities, racial and ethnic identities, and titles at their institutions using their own words in the screening form, which may differ from the definitions provided. The definitions provided honor different identities when discussing gender identity, race, and ethnicity, including terms used and the terms used by staff members interviewed for the study. Dictionary and legal definitions relevant to the study content are also provided.

- *Campus Climate* - Campus climate refers to the level of the sense of friendliness, concern for oneself by others, the level of a welcoming environment, types of interactions (e.g., positive or negative) interactions, a reflection of the self in course curriculum, the sense of belonging, and perceived safety (Garvey et al., 2015; Hurtado et al., 2015).
- *Capitalism*: Capitalism is an economics concept that describes the pursuit of profit and private appropriation, engages in property rights, and includes the investment and financial infrastructure of goods or money (Harris & Delanty, 2023).
- *Imperialism*: Imperialism is the practice of a powerful nation or culture which extends its power upon other territories or societies in which there is economic domination or an expectation of cultural hegemony (Wright, 1967).
- *Legal Discrimination*: Legal discrimination is treatment or harassment based on protected categories by the United States government. This includes race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, gender identity, and sexual orientation), national origin, disability, age (age 40 or older), or genetic information (U.S. Department of Labor, 2023).
- *Microaggression*: Microaggressions are derogatory or harmful slights, notions, or comments, verbal or otherwise, that may or may not be intentional based on race, ethnicity, gender, ability, or another status (Sue et al., 2007).
- *Policing*: Policing involves social control, surveillance, and enforcement of maintaining a certain public order to ensure the safety of communities and security. Policing is also used to enforce social and behavioral norms through control (Crofts et al., 2013).
- *Staff*: Staff are employees who provide administrative and functional support without the role of teaching at a university. This study's designation of 'staff' will exclude Associate Vice Presidents or Associate Vice Chancellors and above in leadership at colleges and

universities. In this study, the definition used of ‘staff’ includes professionals at the director or managerial level, including the classifications of administrative assistants, facilities managers, custodial service, registrars, admissions counselors, financial aid officers, building engineers, and more.

Considerations of Gender, Race, and Ethnicity

Terms and concepts of and about gender are complex, are dependent on each person, and cannot be easily defined in a brief glossary of definitions. In this section, critical terms about gender and how race and ethnicity are included (or excluded) in trans scholarship, which are paramount to this study, are defined. In alignment with the decolonial trans* of color critique framework (Salas-SantaCruz, 2021), additional context is provided when necessary, as are examples to help further explain the use and function of terms related to racial and ethnic gender-affirming terms.

The terms used to describe people’s lived experiences and identities, especially about gender and gender expression, can evolve and be fluid throughout their lives. They are not necessarily static definitions (Bakkar & Walker, 2020). The discussion of gender in this study may differ from those of other scholars and researchers. To describe the phenomena of gender related to the study, Stryker’s (2018) description of gender is used:

But gender and identity.... are really complicated phenomena when you start taking them apart and breaking them down...new terms and concepts come into existence all the time, and that words being used when this book was written may well have fallen out of currency, or out of favor by the time this book is being read. (p. 10)

As Stryker (2018) notes, there are complications with the use of the term gender, and there are important considerations within this study as it relates to the experiences of transgender people

of color and gender. While there are differing opinions on the definition of gender, I was mindful of the critique of white trans studies by Salas-SantaCruz (2021), who emphasized the importance of centering on trans people of color as a lens for research:

...[white trans studies is a] colonized assumption that all racial groups and ethnic cultures conceptualize gender, gender embodiment, or gender variance in homogenous ways...Trans* of Color Critique is an epistemological antiracist practice wherein scholars rethink the taken-for-granted assumptions about the category transgender, such as a singular conception of the self. (p. 1)

As Salas-SantaCruz (2021) describes, my role as researcher and my positionality as a Latinx nonbinary transmasculine scholar create a context in which I sought to create knowledge in the ways of knowledge of transgender people of color, whereas white trans studies focus on the singularity of gender. My positionality as a practitioner in higher education informs my research lens, which has limitations. Therefore, my limitations due to my lived experience create the opportunity for flexibility and an understanding that the definitions I provide in this dissertation can and may differ from other transgender scholars of color. Additionally, I define the term used by Salas-SantaCruz (2021) in their framework, *racial capitalism*, as it is used in the analysis and description of the dissertation's findings.

According to Robinson (1983) and Robinson et al.'s (2020) revision of the book, *Black Marxism: The Making of Black Radical Tradition*, the origination of the term racial capitalism stems from white South African Marxists. Robinson et al. (2020) describe the term stems from a short paper by South African Marxists Legassik and Hemson (1973), which describes the concerns of allowing international capital into the apartheid South African state due to the exploitation of Black bodies and the creation of more racial inequalities. Robinson (1983)

expanded on Legassik and Hemson's (1973) observations to create a framework that describes the reliance of capitalism on racism to perpetuate inequities that result in *racial capitalism*.

Antiblackness (ross & Givens, 2023) is a theme that arose from this study's findings that I expand upon in this section. ross & Givens (2023) describe *antiblackness* as its inextricable link to Afropessimism (Wilderson, 2020) and describe rather than being viewed as humans, Black people are viewed as "sentient beings" and are inextricably tied to the phenomenon of slavery. According to Afropessimism, the tie of Black people to slavery is permanent and cannot be undone in current society. Therefore, Black people are not viewed as human, are objectified, and are seen as less than human when compared to other populations, which is shown in the findings section of my dissertation. Additionally, Wallace (2022) described antiblackness as, "...an overarching structural paradigm, engendering a collection of real-world processes and practices that reproduce and reinforce the extant racial order situating those deemed Black at the bottom of the cultural, social, and political hierarchy" (p. 72).

Black co-creators experienced antiblack discrimination, as described by Wallace (2022), such as the perpetual notion of Black people being at the bottom of a racial hierarchy and having little to no social authority. The instances of antiblack racism are further discussed in chapter four. As Salas-SantaCruz (2021) noted, the race and gendered experiences of a transgender person of color cannot be extrapolated from one another therefore, understanding antiblackness and the use of the term in this study is essential to the lived experiences of transgender staff of color.

The findings of this dissertation examine whiteness and the relation of whiteness to cissexism in the findings and analysis. Therefore, it is important to define how I use the term *white* and explain *whiteness* in the context of the study. As a definition used in this study and

through legal text, I lean on the definitions and descriptions of *white* and *whiteness* by Cheryl Harris (1993) from her book *Whiteness as Property* and Ian Haney López from his book *White by Law*. The description of white as Harris (1993) states is, “[t]he law’s construction of whiteness defined and affirmed critical aspects of identity (who is white); of privilege (what benefits accrue to that status); and of property (what *legal* entitlements arise from that status)” (p. 1725) and Haney López (2006) added, “The operation of law does far more than merely legalize race; it defines as well as the spectrum of domination and subordination that constitutes race relations” (p. 36). I used these researcher’s definitions of whiteness and white to name and explicitly call attention to the construction of race as well as the privilege and dominance of race as it relates to the findings of this dissertation study in the findings and discussion chapters.

Gender and Transness

As Stryker (2018) described, *gender* may have different meanings, which makes understanding the nuances of the term complicated. Social gender expectations can be complex and multi-faceted due to cultural and social norms. The definition of *gender* used is a Westernized and United States-centric term that differs from other countries and cultures. The concept of gender categorizes bodies, which may or may not correlate with a person’s understanding and experiences of their gender assumed by a society based on their assigned sex (Stryker, 2018).

The concept and understanding of gender depend on the cultural and social context regarding levels of acceptance of behaviors, mannerisms, and gender expression that are perceived as feminine or masculine due to social constructs that may or may not fit within a gender binary (Haefele-Thomas, 2019). For example, some countries may consider cisgender men to wear skirts such as the kilt to be socially appropriate, and other countries may perceive

that to be socially deviant behavior and not be widely accepted. Some terms used to describe gender include cisgender, man, woman, transgender, nonbinary, genderqueer, genderfluid, bigender, and more (Newman, 2021).

The term *sex* is typically used as a synonym for the type of genitals that someone has when they are born and/or the assigned sex they are labeled with when they develop in the womb (Stryker, 2018; Nicolazzo, 2016). Stryker (2008) stated sex refers to the reproduction capacity and there are multiple ways sex can be exhibited in humans and species through genetic or chromosomal makeup. Societies can determine how these sexes can be viewed, often conflated with the concept of gender. *Sex (assigned)*, in the most basic definition, is the sex assigned to a baby at birth on their birth certificate, often based on their genitalia and in combination with sex chromosomes (University of Washington Medicine, 2022). Stryker (2018) provided a nuance of the definition of *sex* to include that multiple sexes occur among different animal species, including humans, although they may not necessarily be acknowledged. Haelefe-Thomas (2019) describes the assumptions made by knowing a child's genitalia and that definitions of a body's sex fail to acknowledge intersex people that can be based on chromosomal makeup and differences of sex development that can occur during puberty or prior.

One predominant term used to describe a type of gender, which is used frequently in this study, is *cisgender*. *Cisgender* refers to someone whose gender aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth, such as a person assigned female and raised as a 'girl' who later identifies as a woman and was first used in the Oxford English Dictionary in 2016, although the origin of the term cisgender is from alt.transgendered (1992), a website on which people could blog (Defosse, 2023; Nicolazzo, 2016; Stryker, 2018). Defosse (2023) coined the term because of the transphobic instances and discriminatory experiences that she witnessed transgender people

going through at the University of Minnesota. The term *cisgender* gained traction in the 21st century as a way to which the originator of the term wanted to name the privilege experienced by cisgender people and the oppressive colonial constructs of gender (alt.transgender, 1992; Defosse, 1994; Stryker, 2018). Stryker (2018) states the term has gained usage since the 2000s by allies and people who identify as the same gender given or assumed by society based on their sex-assigned-at-birth and has been developed due to the terms of “man” and “woman,” oftentimes being defaulted to exclude transgender people. *Cisgender* is used in colleges, universities, non-profit organizations, and activist organizations to resist the automatic use of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ to describe someone by default as ‘nontrans,’ which can create an otherness that happens in language when conceptually thinking about transgender people (Stryker, 2018; Nicolazzo, 2017). As a researcher who uses the term transgender throughout this dissertation as an umbrella term, I recognize researchers such as Dolan (2023) and Diamond (2020) have critiqued the usage of only the terms *transgender* versus *cisgender*, which can perpetuate a binary ideology and rigidly define people who do not describe the nuance in experiences of being transgender or cisgender.

Haelefe-Thomas (2019) also describes *transgender* as a term to describe “...a gender renegade. In other words, the term *transgender* was embraced by people who rejected the gender binary altogether...in its broadest sense can encompass ‘the widest imaginable range of gender variant practices and identities’” (p. 20), which has evolved from the medical term *transgenderist* and the typical association with hormone replacement therapy in the 1970s and 1980s. Stryker (2018) notes the complexity of the term *transgender* includes when a person identifies their gender to be different than social expectations placed upon them based on the sex assigned; someone can have a gender that resists the constructs of gender altogether or have a

gender that supersedes any type of socially constructed gender. For example, someone perceived as assigned male may have breasts and a full beard, which may not fit within common colonial perceptions of gender.

Transgender can be utilized as a Westernized umbrella term that may not encompass all experiences of people from different cultures and racial/ethnic communities, which is why the term is used as a foundational one within the study and includes culturally appropriate terms for recruitment of transgender people of color in the methodology to align with the conceptual framework decolonial trans* of color critique (Salas-SantaCruz, 2021). The terms used in the study included terms such as stud, AG, Two-Spirit, and other cultural terms, which are all defined later in this chapter.

Tompkins (2021) describes as relating more to the experiences of people of color who do not conform to typical conceptions of gender. The term transgender can also be seen in research to be shortened to *trans* or *trans**. Nicolazzo (2016) used the asterisk when using the term *trans* to refer to the find works that use *trans-* as a prefix that represent the fluidity of gender experiences and rids the conflation between transgender and transsexual, whereas Salas-SantaCruz (2021) used the asterisk to note the various transgender people of color often excluded from white transgender studies. However, the decolonial trans* critique framework (Salas-SantaCruz, 2021) notes the use of the asterisk should be used when discussing the experiences of transgender people of color as they are oftentimes excluded from white trans studies such as the research by Nicolazzo (2017) and other white transgender scholars.

Nonbinary can be an umbrella term for anyone who does not identify exclusively as a man or woman or identifies outside of the binary of man and woman (Vincent & Barker, 2021; Twist et al., 2020). Additionally, nonbinary people challenge the idea of distinct genders and

evoke existing outside of a gender spectrum altogether (Matsuno & Budge, 2017). The term *nonbinary* can also encompass nonbinary identities, including agender, androgynous, bigender, demi girl/demi boy, genderfluid, gender variant, pangender, and more (Darwin, 2022). Matsuno and Budge (2017) conducted a critical literature review of nonbinary identities to create a better understanding of the term. They found being nonbinary can include being a man or woman at different or simultaneous times. Some people who are nonbinary may not have a gender identity at all.

The term *cissexism* describes the actions and ideology cisgender bodies are superior to trans bodies within society and the privileges that are afforded to people who have sociocultural acceptance in society because of being cisgender (Barbee et al., 2022). One example of cissexism is the requirement of transgender women athletes to undergo an explicit medical process to compete in women's sports with cisgender women (McClearan, 2015). Cissexism includes the regulation and political control over trans bodies to be deemed unnatural or inferior, such as the medical industrial complex in the United States, which sets requirements for a diagnosis of gender dysphoria (American Psychiatric Association, 2022) to prove one's transness to obtain life-saving medical procedures and prescriptions for transgender people.

Gender expression is described as one's embodiment of gender through language, clothing, and gestures and can be medically induced through gender-affirmative healthcare (Nicolazzo, 2016). Stryker (2018) described *gender expression* as how people perform or exhibit gender that can be aligned with social expectations or do not conform to social expectations, such as a cisgender man wearing a suit and tie to work or lipstick and makeup to complement their attire for work. People can signal their gender by telling others their gender, calling themselves a "man" or another gender term, as well as attempting to be viewed as a gender of

their identity. Ways people do this include practicing making their voice higher or lower pitched to signal to others their gender or conforming their mannerisms to be more masculine or feminine.

Misgendering is calling or categorizing someone as a gender different from the one with which they identify. The practice of misgendering can include using incorrect pronouns or addressing someone in a gendered way, such as calling someone “ma’am” when they are not a woman (Nordmarken, 2021). Howansky et al. (2022) described misgendering as miscategorizing people and their gender, such as labeling them a different gender through pronouns or explicitly identifying them as a different gender than their true gender and lived experience. For example, someone with a high-pitched voice with a secondary sex trait of breasts may be called ‘ma’am’ upon entering a store because they are perceived as a woman by the sound of their voice, even when they do not identify as one.

The practice of misgendering is arguably a form of cissexism that invisibilizes the identities of trans people and perpetuates the idea that cisgender people are superior. McLemore’s (2015) research confirm the act of misgendering a transgender person can cause emotional harm and create negative social consequences that can lead trans people to feelings of anxiety, the potential for being outed, and lower self-esteem.

The term *passing* is described by Anderson et al. (2020) as someone being able to ‘pass’ as a specific gender, for example, for a transgender person who was assigned female-at-birth to pass as a cisgender man. There are ongoing discussions about whether trans people should attempt to pass and if people should strive to achieve passing. For example, if a transgender man wants to “pass” or be perceived as a cisgender man, that may be a goal of his to be safe or feel more like himself. The ability to pass may not be a desirable goal for trans people and may not

be for others (Anderson et al., 2020). Anderson et al. (2020) and William's (2013) research found transgender people are motivated to pass to be validated in their gender identity and to eliminate the possibility of being discriminated against by others.

Co-creators in this study referred to the experience of *passing*, and each defined the term differently. Some people altogether rejected the gender binary due to the colonial roots; as Pulido (2023) notes, "Truth be told, I no longer wish to be seen by the cis-imperialist-white gaze" (p. 50). Some participants in this study discussed this occurrence of rejection notions of cisnormativity or the idea that *passing*, in general, is a colonial construct. The term *coming out* or being *out* describes the phenomenon of someone having their sexuality or gender identity disclosed to another person by coming out to them.

Arguably, one of the most commonly used terms for an LGBTQ person disclosing their identity to someone else is being *out* or *coming out* (Savin-Williams, 2005). In alignment with Salas-SantaCruz's (2021) decolonial trans* of color critique, the process of coming out is seen as a Western concept by many, as Orozco (2022) argues, because coming out is not a one-time instance; it is a consistent process and may not include the sharing of vulnerability as the experience can be for communities of color.

Nicolazzo (2021b) described the term *trans killability* as a phenomenon related to the spectre of the tranny; which invalidates, invisibilizes, and perpetuates violence against transgender women. The *spectre of the tranny* (Nicolazzo, 2021b) is a concept that cisgender people fear transgender people, especially transgender women. *Trans killability* is a concept that reiterates trans people are just a spectacle to cisgender people who are not to be taken seriously, are considered laughable, and can, therefore, be eradicated. At the essence of this dissertation study, transgender people are perpetually dehumanized by systems of oppression (Woodford et

al., 2018) and through administrative violence (Spade, 2015), which impacts their abilities to obtain and secure jobs, create financial instability, and often leads to experiencing homelessness or suicidal ideation.

Nicolazzo (2021b) described the transgender panic legal defense as a political signal to justify the violence against trans women and can be considered a type of genocide that seeks to abolish transgender women from existence. The transgender panic defense is a defense tool lawyers have used to defend the murder of transgender women due to the fear that cisgender men have experienced when finding out that their partner is transgender (Michalski et al., 2022). *Transmisogynoir* (Kacere, 2018) is a term that describes the intersectional experience of transphobia, misogyny, and antiblackness. Researchers (Kacere, 2018; Serano, 2021) describe how Black trans women can experience transmisogynoir and the phenomenon within femininity that women are worth less than men, in addition to the phenomenon that transgender women are less valuable than other women.

The co-creators in the study used words such as *clocking* (or to *clock* someone), which is the process of coming out or being outed and described experiences of *transmisogynoir* and *transmisogyny*. *Clock* or to experience *clocking* (Schiffer, 2022) is a term used by transgender people to describe the moment or time when other people figure out they are transgender. The act of being *clocked* or to be *clocked* assumes transness can be assumed, and trans (or cis people) can be detected (Schiffer, 2022). While there are multiple arguments and discussions about the idea of whether someone can be *clocked* by another person or detected in society as being cisgender or transgender, trans-feminine people experience this particularly. *Transmisogyny* is a specific form of discrimination, prejudice, and violence transgender women and trans feminine people experience due to their combined lived experience as women and have been assigned

males in a society that commits perpetual violence against them (Serano, 2007). The combination of Black transgender women's identities often leads to exclusion, isolation, violence in different forms, harassment, and discrimination.

The terms described and defined in this section are essential for me to define and differentiate due to my positionality as a trans masculine researcher who does not experience the same discrimination, such as antiblackness and transmisogynoir. Due to my own privilege of most times in public being perceived and seen as a cisgender man or lesbian cisgender woman, although I am neither, I have gained the privilege to access spaces that are safer for me than if I were assigned male and transgender. Some of the co-creators in the study did not use the terms transmisogyny and transmisogynoir to explicitly describe their experiences of discrimination in higher education. However, it was obvious to me, as will be described in the findings chapter, that they had experienced transmisogyny and transmisogynoir in the discriminatory actions they faced in higher education due to their transfeminine identities. However, their experiences reflect the definitions of these terms, which encompass violence, sexism, and abhorrent hate that transgender women confront.

Gendered facilities (Cavanagh, 2010) are spaces which promote and perpetuate the idea of gender essentialism, a gender binary, and cisnormative bodies that correspond with social expectations of a 'man' or 'woman.' Gendered restrooms were created to promote gender-based surveillance and were founded in the 1700s in the state of Massachusetts and were based on the idea women needed to be safe from men in bathroom/restroom situations (Cavanagh, 2010). The perpetuation of the concept of keeping women safe from men also influences the ideology of dog-whistling tropes that perpetuate violence against transgender people (Haney López, 2015). For example, the stereotype and trope that transgender women are men dressed in a costume or

drag to gain access to gendered facilities to harm women and children or to trick and seduce straight men.

Recognizing the Holistic Existence of Transgender People of Color

While in the previous section I set an important fundamental discussion about gender and the nuances of terms within gender, I also presented a critique vital to doing research with trans people of color. As a trans researcher of color, I argue in alignment with Salas-SantaCruz's (2021) decolonial trans* of color critique that white trans studies' singular notions of gender do not serve this dissertation. In this section, I describe the importance of colloquial, racial, and ethnic terms that have come to prioritize people of color and people of different ethnicities when describing their transness, which is essential to the research in this study as the focus is on transgender people of color.

First, it is important to define how the terms *race* and *ethnicity* are used in this study. Hurtado (2019) described the discourse of race being a social construct of more recent and that people may have different definitions, depending on the scholars. As Morrison (1992) described, the term has been used to describe the phenotype of a person, which can include someone's skin color, facial structure or features, and hair, focusing on the biology of a person. The biological understanding of race creates social hierarchies that perpetuate violence against people of color, such as eugenics and genocide (Hurtado, 2019). While there is an ongoing discussion about biology versus social construction and the meaning of race, I leaned on the definition Wade et al. (2023) provided: *race* is a social construct that includes people who are categorized into different groups based on similar physical appearances which can consist of skin color, physical traits, and heritage. For *ethnicity*, the sociological definition provided by Phelps and Nadim (2014) is used. This describes the use of the term to describe people with similar cultural traditions,

understandings, and relationships between similar groups. For example, the experiences of people of the same ethnicity can be from a common descent or origin and are more often used to describe marginalized communities.

The focus of white trans studies and the exclusion of discourse on the experiences of trans people of color perpetuates white supremacy and colonial notions of gender (Salas-SantaCruz, 2021), which inherently eradicates the ways of experiencing gender by Native peoples (Driskill, 2016). One example of why it is paramount to include people of color in recruitment is to frame the discourse of the terms used by people of color to describe their own lived experiences of gender, such as *joto*, *ag*, *two-spirit*, or *stud*. The terms *Joto* and *marícon* have been previously described as pejorative and used to describe someone Latinx exhibiting gender non-conforming traits and characteristics (Carrillo & Fontdevila, 2014). These terms can be equated to the English term “faggot” which has also been used as a reclamation within Jotería academics as “...a new generation of mutigendered queer Chican@s and Latin@s, trained and nurtured by women of color feminisms and feminists” (Hames-Garcia, 2014, p. 152). To understand how Blackness and transness intertwine in the dissertation study as well as theoretically, I lean into Snorton’s (2017) description of discussing the histories of Blackness and transness:

...my analysis here is particularly attentive to the possibilities of valorizing-without necessarily redeeming-different wants of knowing and being, as it is also invested in reviving and inventing strategies for inhabiting unlivable worlds. It is an attempt to think more precisely about the connections within blackness and transness in the midst of ongoing black and trans death and against the backdrop of the rapid institutionalization of trans studies. (p. 7)

The importance of naming the significance of Snorton's (2017) description of Blackness and transness is the need to reiterate Black transgender people are holistic people due to the perpetuation of antiblackness co-creators experienced in higher education, which is described in the findings chapter of this dissertation. I also acknowledge there are different ways of knowing and being transgender that cannot be encompassed by the white supremacist and the institutionalized [white] trans studies to fully understand how transness is experienced by Black people in the study. Therefore, there are opportunities for co-creators to self-disclose their own gender identity and race/ethnicity in the screening form and describe this in the interviews.

Two-Spirit is a term originated in the North Algonquin (Driskill, 2016) dialect used to describe people who have both feminine and masculine spirits within themselves, which as a critique, posits queer studies [and trans studies] in the United States should be pushed toward decolonial research and literature. Driskill (2016) describes the importance of Two-Spirit critiques to "...decentralize white, male, middle-class formulations of queerness...Two-Spirit critiques point to queer studies' responsibility to examine ongoing colonialism, genocide, survival, and resistance of Native nations and peoples as well as radically engage with issues of gender and sexuality" (p. 37). As previously described, the importance of decolonial research to center the experiences of Native peoples in gender and sexuality studies is paramount due to colonial and white supremacist focuses on cisgender white middle- or upper-class men in gender and sexuality research.

Definitions of Discrimination

Throughout the study, I focused on the experiences of transgender staff in higher education and sought to understand what causes trans staff to report discrimination. While some terms provided above have general definitions, the term *discrimination* in this study will depend

on the context and may differ depending on its use. Therefore, the term *discrimination* is vital to define and differentiate between the legal definition and the standard dictionary use.

Co-creators used the term discrimination and their reports of discrimination may have different meanings depending on the context or whether they met a legal threshold by the institution's definition or not. Merriam-Webster (2023) dictionary defines discrimination as “a) prejudiced or prejudicial outlook, action, or treatment, b) the act, practice, or an instance of discriminating categorically rather than individually” (p. 1). The legal definitions of *discrimination* set by the Supreme Court (Civil Rights Act, 1964) and the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2022) are described in the following subsection.

Legal Definition

While *discrimination* may be a term used in this study, the legal definition of *discrimination* used by institutions when reviewing complaints of discrimination and the everyday use of the term *discrimination*, which may not meet a legal threshold. The United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) (2022) defines sex-based discrimination as “sex discrimination involves treating someone (an applicant or employee) unfavorably because of the person's sex, including the person's sexual orientation, gender identity, or pregnancy” (p. 1). The commission includes offensive comments made by another person in the workplace. The EEOC describes protection against sex discrimination in the workplace, which includes training, hiring, firing, pay, benefits, and other aspects of employment, including lack of promotion.

According to the EEOC (2022), although there are explicit descriptions of harassment and discriminatory actions, these practices become illegal when the actions are “...so frequent or

severe that it creates a hostile or offensive work environment or results in an adverse employment decision” (p. 1). Co-creators shared they reported discrimination based on their gender identity due to their experiences. According to the Office of Title IX departments on college campuses, complaints submitted may not meet the legal discrimination threshold. I provided and used the legal definition and threshold for the term discrimination because the legal term is the primary use of *discrimination* in this study. The following section discusses court cases that include gender identity discrimination that create the legal definitions of discrimination in the workplace.

Court Cases of Gender Identity and Discrimination

The Supreme Court ruled in 2020 that employees cannot be discriminated against based on gender identity and sexual orientation, protected by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 under Title VII. The opinion in *Bostock v. Clayton County* from 2020 stated, “An employer who fires an individual merely for being gay or transgender violates Title VII...The term ‘discriminate’ meant “[t]o make a difference in treatment or favor (of one as compared with others)” (p. 1). The *Bostock v. Clayton County* (2020) case determined terminating employment due to gender identity and sexual orientation is discrimination based on sex. *Bostock v. Clayton County* (2020) constitutes protections against discrimination in private-sector, state, government employment, job applicants, and former employees. However, Title VII does not cover employers with fewer than fifteen employees (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2022). Trans people employed at organizations or companies with less than fifteen employees do not have the legal grounding to be protected by Title VII as defined by the federal government. Therefore, trans people experience more disproportionately harmful and inequitable blatant discrimination without recourse.

Protection of someone based on their gender identity also includes gender expression protection in employee dress codes (*R.G. & G.R. Harris Funeral Homes, Inc. v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2018*). One example of protection via policy would be a transgender employee who does not need to dress in the workplace's expected manner with their assigned sex at birth and can dress in ways consistent with their gender identity (*R.G. & G.R. Harris Funeral Homes, Inc. v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2018*). Additionally, Title VII (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2021) includes protection for employees to access gendered facilities that correspond with their gender identity. However, the instated laws and protections from Title VII must guide employees who want to avoid using gendered facilities. Employers cannot tell employees to use a restroom that does not align with their gender identity; such a requirement may lead an employee to report discrimination at their workplace.

Experiences of Reporting Discrimination in the Workplace

This study focused on the stories of trans higher education staff and their experiences reporting discrimination. Therefore, descriptions of workplace discrimination experiences are needed. Because there is a gap in the literature, specifically on the experiences of reporting discrimination based on gender identity in higher education, I leaned on Ahmed's (2021) and other researchers' findings on the experiences of reporting sexual harassment in higher education.

Ahmed (2021) argues how institutions approach the idea of a 'complaint' as a word is flawed and undermines the intent of the person reporting discrimination. Ahmed stated,

To be heard as complaining is not to be heard. To hear someone complaining is an effective way of dismissing someone. You do not have to listen to the content of what she is saying if she is *just* complaining or *always* complaining. (p. 1)

Ahmed's research examined the experiences of filing complaints in academia. Since people reporting discrimination may be seen as complaining unnecessarily, how do they decide to report it? Ahmed (2021) described reporting discrimination as a game of chess in many ways; overcoming blockages that are part of institutional mechanics makes reporting discrimination emotionally and mentally exhausting. For example, someone who experiences discrimination in the workplace needs to prove the experience they report meets the legal threshold of discrimination. In other words, people who report harassment and discrimination must re-traumatize themselves by re-telling their stories to administrators to believe them. People report complaints for different reasons, which are discussed in the next paragraph.

Complaints begin to formulate when something does not feel right about oneself, a situation, or a circumstance in the workplace in higher education (Ahmed, 2021). Ahmed (2021) described the experience of someone coming to realize the need to complain stems from their discomforting feelings about the situation or circumstances they experience. One example from Ahmed's (2021) study is when a queer student found a faculty member had a pattern of grooming students to meet with him in his home. The student felt uncomfortable with boundaries being crossed and signs of intimidation if they did not do what the professor wanted. According to their conscience, the student reported her experience with the faculty member's behavior because his actions had become solidified. Examples of boundaries being crossed for students, such as sexual harassment, can exemplify the discrimination that can occur when there are power

dynamics in workplace relationships. Similarly, transgender staff in my study reported discrimination and sexual harassment due to power dynamics with supervisors or colleagues.

The fear of reporting discrimination can prevent people from reporting due to fear of retaliation or the reporting having a negative impact on employment status (Bumiller, 1988). One study focusing on the experiences of federal employees found cisgender women were afraid of retaliation, being on banned lists for employment, or having issues with being promoted if they complained (Yu & Lee, 2020). Women in this study also did not want to be seen as someone who complained and was unsure if reporting the harassment was worth it. Bumiller (1988) found women were less likely to report sex discrimination and harassment due to the shame brought upon them if they reported. Participants in Bumiller's (1988) study shared they felt uncomfortable complaining about discrimination since it required the women to become victims and, therefore, they felt embarrassed. While research on cisgender women fearing reporting discrimination provides some insight as to why there can be concerns over reporting discrimination in the workplace, the research exclusively focused on cisgender women does not provide adequate information without exploring the stories of trans staff in higher education. My study provides additional content and information to inform policymakers and administrators in higher education.

When People Want to Report

Ahmed (2021) showed people who want to report discrimination can resist discouragement from colleagues and peers because of their own experiences through *institutional fatalism*. Institutional fatalism is the thought that institutions cannot be changed, or there should not be an effort to change them (Ahmed, 2021). Complaints can be seen as fatalism; once someone files a complaint, they can only expect the same outcome others experienced,

including adverse decisions and emotional turmoil down the line (Ahmed, 2021). For example, one student shared she wanted to report sexual harassment and was told by a mentor she should. However, the mentor told her she should think about the power and reputation of the man who sexually harassed her due to his power on campus. The mentor described their own traumatic experience reporting sexual harassment and thought it impacted her career negatively. Another young academic discussed reporting harassment and was warned about the potential of her harasser filing a defamation lawsuit against her if she filed a complaint.

As shown in the previous example and in the next one, people in higher education can be discouraged from reporting discrimination due to power dynamics and the fear of retaliation. Ahmed (2021) described this experience as “When warnings are used to discourage a course of action, they also function as more positive directives: you are being encouraged not to complain to ‘let it go’ by resolving things in some other way or by hoping for some other resolution” (p. 71). While people who report discrimination may be called complainants, I refer to those who report discrimination reporters to subside stereotypes or stigma associated with being called a complainant.

Reporters also have a risk of the stigma of being labeled as someone who puts in many grievances and as a result, become someone with whom others want to avoid professionally. While people warning others about complaining in higher education may come from a place of care, these warnings can cause people never to share their stories and experiences. The pushback from colleagues about filing complaints not only comes from peers but also from professionals in human resources, union representatives, or others projecting their own experiences.

When People Report

After filing a complaint, the time after the report's findings drags on. Ahmed (2021) discussed the dragging of waiting for the results of a report of discrimination to be a heavy weight to carry for the reporter. Once complaints are taken on by administrators who oversee complaints at a university, there is often a slow response due to a backlog of cases and a limited number of administrators. Participants in Ahmed's (2021) study described the strategy of institutions taking over seven months to respond to the complaint because they may have wanted the reporters to give up on the complaint itself since it was taking so long to address.

Another reason people report a complaint is the concept of *misfitting*. *Misfitting* is when a person does not fit into an environment built and arranged in a way that benefits most hegemonic bodies and the unoppressed (Garland-Thomson, 2011). Components of such environments include accessible restrooms and facilities for people of different genders, medical insurance coverage that excludes gender-affirming healthcare, etc. Understanding how a structure does not provide access to someone can be the start of a complaint because of the obstacles those structures create. For example, if someone has a physical disability and cannot move around the facility to do their work, or if someone's existence inconveniences others by needing accommodation, which can be seen as a nuisance, even when they have a legal right to receive and request accommodation.

Experiences of Discrimination in the Workplace

Ruggs et al. (2015) discussed three factors contributing to discrimination in organizations: organizational policies, coworkers who contribute to the experience of a transgender employee, and the level of 'outness' transgender employees are at work. For example, if transgender people had colleagues who created a more positive experience for them

to be out or disclose they are transgender, there was an increase in the level of outness and disclosure to employees made within the organization.

Research by Ruggs et al. (2015) examined the levels of trans employees' workplace policies, coworkers' supportiveness, and the participant's openness about their gender identity. Ruggs et al. (2015) found of 118 transgender participants, the majority (76%) were white and had supportive cisgender coworkers. Ruggs' participants had coworkers who helped to create a norm to combat gender identity discrimination in the workplace by addressing concerns from others against their trans coworkers. Additionally, Fogarty and Zheng (2018) found once transgender employees begin to medically and socially transition, they experience more micromanagement (e.g., supervisors checking on the trans employee's quality of work more often, questioning decisions the transgender employee made and questioning the trans employee's competency) from their supervisors and were not taken as seriously as before their transition.

Organizational policies only influenced the perception of discrimination by transgender employees if the policies were appropriately enforced and instituted. Organizations with explicit non-discrimination policies that protect protected categories of identities attempt to signal to potential perpetrators of discrimination that such behavior would not be tolerated (Ruggs et al., 2015). Although non-discrimination policies are in place to prohibit discriminatory behavior, trans employees still experience discrimination in the workplace. Among transgender employees in one study (Fogarty & Zheng, 2018), almost half cited incidents of trans employees experiencing purposely misgendered, many were at risk of being terminated from employment being denied a promotion, and the majority were not hired altogether.

Additionally, most transgender employees feel the need to hide their identity in the workplace to protect themselves from discrimination. The differences in how transgender masculine people, trans feminine people, and nonbinary people are treated is further discussed.

Disparities Among Different Gender Identities

Research shows discrepancies in the experiences of transgender feminine and transmasculine people in their experience as employees within an organization (Schilt & Wiswall, 2008; Dozier, 2005; Schilt, 2006). While transgender and nonbinary people generally experience workplace discrimination, there are different experiences among different gender identities. The various experiences and disparities in treatment in the workplace are described in the following sections.

As discussed in the Use of Terms section, the following sections discuss the varying experiences of discrimination faced by trans feminine employees, which is placed in the same section as transgender women, the experiences of trans men and transgender masculine people, and the experiences of nonbinary employees in the workplace. The section on nonbinary employees also includes descriptions of the experiences of people both assigned male and assigned female who are nonbinary and may have differing experiences.

Transfeminine people experience a decrease in earnings, loss of authoritative positions, and more harassment in the workplace or loss of jobs altogether (Carrazana & Mithani, 2023; Schilt & Wiswall, 2008). Among the transgender women in the study by Rudin et al. (2014), 38% experienced support from coworkers, and 62% experienced hostility from coworkers. The hostility trans women experience included being forced to use the men's restroom while transitioning.

Fogarty and Zheng's (2018) study found all transgender woman applicants experienced unemployment, and despite being highly qualified in their fields, they could not secure a professional position. While some trans women eventually secured employment, they experienced what Spade (2015) calls administrative violence; they dealt with pay cuts and worsening workplace conditions due to the fear of remaining unemployed if they left their current work due to employment discrimination. Ruden et al. (2014) found while there were transgender women who experienced negative recourse of their being out, 38% of their coworkers supported their being out as trans.

Transgender masculine people and trans men are more likely to receive increases in compensation, receive promotions, and are perceived as more authoritative and respected leaders in the workplace compared to transgender women (Beauregard et al., 2018; Dietert & Dentice, 2010). Transgender masculine people are also seen as a source of support and advice from cisgender men in the workplace, which can add to disparate workloads for transgender masculine employees. Often, cisgender men lean on trans masculine coworkers to better understand how to navigate situations that arise in the workplace (Dozier, 2005; Schilt, 2006; Beauregard et al., 2018). Reed et al. (2015) asserts although transgender men are seen in a somewhat positive light by their coworkers, their gender identity influences the stereotypical perception of mental illness due to being transgender. The negative mental illness stigma of transgender men leads to fewer recommendations in the workplace (Reed et al., 2015). This stereotype about transgender men, in turn, provides a more hostile and deficit perception by their cisgender peers.

Research shows nonbinary assigned-male-at-birth (AMAB) and transgender women people in the workplace are liked the least by their coworkers and were rated lowest in work performance (Dray et al., 2020). Nonbinary employees assigned to female-at-birth (AFAB) were

provided the most flexibility in job performance. AFAB employees who were more masculine in appearance were perceived to have a more positive work performance than nonbinary assigned male employees (Dray et al., 2020). The disparate outcomes of the experiences of transmasculine employees, nonbinary employees, and transgender feminine employees replicate the colonial constructs of value among gender expression and gender overall that can lead to discriminatory experiences in the workplace.

As discussed previously, the experiences of transgender people vary among gender identities and gender expression. Therefore, context-specific interventions to circumvent discriminatory actions are needed (Rudin et al., 2014). This study's co-creators included people with various gender identities and experiences to explore disparities and provide insight into potential interventions to address challenges experienced by transgender people.

Role of Supervisors in Discrimination

As Ahmed (2021) describes, supervisors play a role in an employee's reporting of discrimination. Co-creators discussed the role their supervisors played in their decision to report discrimination and how they navigated the process. Therefore, it is important to discuss research that describes the role of a supervisor in the experience of a transgender employee.

Research shows how a cisgender supervisor's response to a transgender employee's use of restrooms and climate in the workplace while transitioning falls into three areas: hostility, compliance, and inclusion (Rudin et al., 2014). An example of hostility in the workplace by supervisors includes disallowing employees to use the restroom that corresponds with their gender identity until they have medically transitioned. Cisgender supervisors who participated in Rudin et al.'s (2014) study indicated they intended to comply with anti-discrimination policies and warned coworkers to stop verbally harassing transitioning employees. Cisgender supervisors

described their reason for abiding by non-discrimination policies in the workplace were because they wanted to create a more inclusive workplace for people and took actions such as providing non-gendered restrooms, allowing anyone to use the restroom in which they felt comfortable, and designating all restrooms to be all-gender restrooms (Rudin et al., 2014). Rudin et al.'s (2014) research showed cisgender supervisors provided various inclusive actions, such as creating all-gender restrooms or correcting people's use of pronouns and names, which lead to more remedies to abide by non-discrimination policies. Their inclusive decisions illustrated how they supported a transitioning employee.

Rice et al. (2021) discussed power dynamics between cisgender supervisors and transgender employees that can perpetuate harm to trans employees due to bias. Because cisgender people are more likely to supervise transgender employees than the other way around, gatekeeping can prevent trans employees from getting promotions and succeeding in their professional positions. Cisgender people have prejudgments of transgender job applicants, interviewees, and candidates for professional positions, which can inadvertently limit the number of trans people hired and promoted at an organization. Given cisgender people's initial prejudice against transgender applicants, the next section describes the contributing factors to discrimination against transgender employees.

Factors Contributing to Discrimination

The literature shows four main factors that contribute to the discrimination experienced in the workplace by transgender employees: a) Stereotypes and assumptions of transgender people, b) Cisgender people's lack of familiarity with trans people, c) Perceptions of transgender employees and applicants, and d) Ineffective use of policies. Each factor is expanded on below.

Stereotypes and Assumptions About Transgender People

Binary social constructs of gender in Western society of men and women create prejudice and stereotypes of people who do not conform to gender norms and expectations of people and their sex-assigned-at-birth (Gallagher & Bodenhausen, 2021). Billard (2018) describes psychological stereotyping by cisgender people of transgender people, which is their desire to de-gender trans people and deny transgender people express their *true* gender identity. As a result, transgender identities are seen as invalid. For example, cisgender people de-gender trans men by claiming they are not men and, therefore, consider their gender to be illegitimate. As Billard (2018) and Nadal (2019) described, the concept of de-gendering people can lead to microaggressions of misgendering, not taking transgender people's gender identity seriously, and categorizing people into conventional understandings of the gender binary based on sex-assigned-at-birth.

Gallagher and Bodenhausen's (2021) study focused on the stereotyping of trans men and women by cisgender people and found gender essentialist views informed the assumptions formed by cisgender people of transgender people. Cisgender participants applied gender stereotypes to trans women typically associated with cisgender men and stereotypical traits of cisgender women to transgender men due to viewing them as their assigned sex at birth (Gallagher & Bodenhausen, 2021). For example, in Gallaher and Bodenhausen's (2021) study, trans women were perceived as less trustworthy, warm, and feminine than cisgender women were. Transgender men were seen as less assertive and less capable than cisgender men..

Cisgender People's Lack of Familiarity with Trans People

While there has been an increase in the number of Americans who know a transgender person, 58% of people do not personally know someone who is trans, and over 38% of people believe acceptance of transgender people is bad for society (Brown, 2022; Minkin & Brown,

2021). As Weinberg (2010) discussed, both past and current court rulings and laws support the idea and conceptualization of trans bodies as inhumane and as something to be feared. At the time of publication, recent examples of court rulings that rendered transgender bodies inhumane included the South Dakota House Bill Prohibit Certain Medical and Surgical Interventions on Minor Patients (2023) and the Trans Medical Treatments and Procedures Utah State Bill (2023). The bills in South Dakota and Utah banned the use of gender-affirming healthcare for minors and adults, such as hormonal replacement therapy, hormone blockers, and gender-affirming surgeries. Weinberg (2010) states in lawsuits, court cases have previously ruled in favor of workplaces that have fired transgender employees due to the discomfort of cisgender coworkers who used restrooms shared with transgender people.

The objectification and dehumanization of transgender people create false concerns of fear for cisgender people (Hasenbush et al., 2019). The gendered socialization of gendered facilities, as previously discussed, has perpetuated cisnormative concepts about gender that exclude transgender people from being deemed as normal or socially acceptable, which further perpetuates ignorance among cisgender people (Weinberg, 2010). For example, gendered restrooms were created to put women into separate facilities from men due to morality, and all-gender restrooms were considered inappropriate for the protection of women (Kogan, 2007). The socialization of gendered facilities, as previously described, only perpetuates the cisnormative expectations of gender, which can lead to bias and discrimination in the workplace, including higher education.

Perception of Trans Applicants and Employees

Transgender applicants experience discrimination and inequitable assessment from hiring managers and hiring committees compared to their cisgender counterparts (Fogarty & Zheng,

2018; Moss-Racusin & Rabasco, 2017). Research (Reed et al., 2015) found transgender people were less desirable candidates because of the stigma of mental illness and were assumed to be more likely to take days off from work (Reed et al., 2015). The assumption that transgender applicants have mental health issues that can ultimately impact their ability to serve in a professional role is a stereotype that impacts the workplace environment and lived experience of transgender people. Therefore, the perceptions and hiring outcomes of transgender applicants are significant to understand due to the experiences that lead them to report discrimination in higher education.

Research (Moss-Racusin & Rabasco, 2017) shows when cisgender people consider a prior positive interaction with a trans person who is a potential co-worker, they are more likely to find the applicant competent, likable, and hireable. However, when cisgender people had prior negative interactions or lacked interactions altogether with transgender people, they did not perceive the applicants as likable. Additionally, when cisgender people in the study by Moss-Racusin and Rabasco (2017) considered the likeability of a transgender applicant for a job opening, there was no difference in likeability among different identities of transgender people, such as transgender men compared to transgender women. Overall, as Moss-Racusin and Rabasco (2017) describe, trans and nonbinary applicants are less likely to be hired than their cisgender counterparts for a position in the workplace were.

The perception of employees' work-related skills contribute to receiving salary raises and promotions and being seen as reliable coworkers (Rice et al., 2021). Rice et al.'s (2021) research states cisgender employees perceive potential transgender colleagues to have less competency and cognitive skills compared to potential colleagues whose gender identity is unknown to the cisgender people in the study (Rice et al., 2021). Although transgender employees were

perceived to have lower cognitive and work-related skills, cisgender people did not perceive transgender employees to be less successful in the workplace. Findings from the Rice et al. (2021) study showed a disconnect between cisgender employees unknowingly impacting transgender coworkers, which leads to stress if those transgender employees are perceived as being less valuable coworkers. Therefore, hiring managers, search committee members, and supervisors may unconsciously discriminate against trans employees due to biases that can impact their transgender colleague's career trajectories.

Rice et al.'s, (2021) research indicates when transgender employees are perceived as less competent than their peers, they experience discrimination and may not be taken seriously. The perception of trans employees being less competent, having lower cognitive skills, and being less desirable as candidates are stereotypes which lead to discrimination in positions such as staff members in higher education. The following section describes the experiences of discrimination faced by transgender people and trans people of color in higher education, including students, staff, and faculty.

Discrimination Against Trans People in Higher Education

Most research on the transgender experience in higher education has focused explicitly on students (Siegel, 2019). My study provides additional insight and understanding into the affairs of transgender staff in higher education. This section focuses on the limited literature that discusses discrimination in higher education among transgender students, staff, and faculty. While there is more research on students' experiences than the experiences of faculty and staff, students' experiences may reflect similarities to those of faculty and staff and are, therefore, included in this literature review.

Administrators in Higher Education

Administrators in higher education create policies, hire staff, and are leaders in their respective areas (Tolman & Calhoun, 2019; Weisbrod et al., 2008). Student affairs practitioners do not always receive training and coursework in their graduate programs that explicitly trains on management and supervision skills (Tolman & Calhoun, 2019). Without appropriate training and a fundamental understanding of supervision responsibilities, including how to lead a department, practitioners in higher education supervise in a trial-by-error style, which causes harm to marginalized staff. Since transgender employees experience discrimination when applying for professional positions and experience higher rates of gender discrimination in the workplace compared to their cisgender peers (Beauregard et al., 2019; Moss-Racusin & Rabasco, 2018; Reed et al., 2015), there is a need to better understand the experiences of transgender staff in higher education to retain and promote them within the organizations.

Most trained human resource professionals also lack an understanding of supporting trans employees (Siegel, 2019; Sterett, 2018). While organizations and higher education institutions may have gender-affirming healthcare policies and nondiscrimination policies that protect transgender staff, in practice, they may not know how to address the actual needs of transgender staff (Gut et al., 2018). Gut et al. (2018) found many transgender employees experience demotion, termination, and harassment at work due to their gender identity. Managers must proactively support a transitioning (socially or medically) employee and lead staff by example. Therefore, administrators in higher education benefit from understanding why transgender staff report discrimination in higher education to identify inequitable practices and utilize tenets of *trickle-up policies* that focus on the voices and lived experiences of trans people to inform trans-inclusive policies in organizations to stay abreast of policy needs (Spade, 2015). Spade (2014) called for the use of *trickle-up policies*, which design policies to focus on the centering of

experiences of people who are the most vulnerable and marginalized within organizations. The trickle-up policies are then used to inform the agendas for organizational change instead of strictly focusing on the stakeholders who hold the most power and capital that lead organizations. For example, policies should not be used to promote a white cisgender gay agenda of marriage equality when Black, transgender women cannot secure a job without discrimination.

Transgender People in Higher Education

Siegel (2019) argued there is an essential need to understand the experiences of transgender faculty, staff, and students in higher education in different institutional contexts. Although the co-creators in my dissertation study vary in their specific roles in higher education, their experiences are similar in that they are experiencing institutions rooted in white supremacy culture, which should be explored (Wilder, 2013). Therefore, this section describes the experiences of transgender staff, faculty, and students in higher education.

Transgender Students

Transgender students tactfully navigate their social and academic relationships due to objectification and tokenization by the cisgender staff, students, and faculty at their colleges, which are perpetuated by stereotypes that others place on them (Duran & Nicolazzo, 2017; Nicolazzo, 2016). Tactfulness is necessary when transgender students decide whether to disclose their identities to avoid discrimination from peers or faculty. Transgender college students need to manage how they address transphobia from peers and administrators in higher education (Nicolazzo, 2016). There is an imperative need for cisgender peers and educators to do their self-education on different gender identities because they tend to see trans students as ‘other’ when they *look at* transgender students rather than *with* them (Nicolazzo, 2016; Pitcher, 2017; Whitley et al., 2020). For example, Duran and Nicolazzo (2017) describe microaggressions done to trans

students by their cisgender peers, such as questioning their gender identity or the validity of their transness. There is a critical need for specific spaces for transgender people on campus for transgender students to find more comfortable spaces to exist as their authentic selves. Garvey et al. (2019) found a lack of representation and visibility of social identities can perpetuate feelings of alienation.

Like Nicolazzo's (2016) findings about transgender students managing their identities about their peers and not feeling trans enough, Catalano (2015) had similar findings. Catalano's (2015) study focused on the experiences of transgender men in higher education who felt the need to manage the expectations of peers, struggled with the invisibility of their transness due to *passing* and being perceived as cisgender men, and not being seen as under the transgender umbrella. Catalano (2015) shared transgender men in college felt the tension of the inaccessibility or lack of desire to transition while that remained an expectation by their peers medically. Catalano (2015) also found trans men looked to their cisgender male counterparts to ascertain a specific look in appearance to pass better and struggled with being unable to live up to the physical appearance of masculinity and, therefore, did not feel authentic enough as a transgender man. While the campus climate for trans men is not always affirming, students find community among other transgender people. T

he following sections discuss the experiences of trans students in different college campus environments and departments. They also experiences and environments by which transgender students are impacted in higher education, including living in gendered facilities such as residence halls, the experiences of being transgender attending a women's college, the experiences of transgender graduate students, and the experiences of transgender students at community colleges.

Housing and Transgender Students. Housing and residence life communities on college campuses offer comfortable and safe environments for students to have a sense of belonging, grow with one another, and typically have gendered facilities based on sex-assigned-at-birth (Anderson, 2013; Hong & Kircher, 2010; McBride et al., 2011). Considering how much time students spend on campus and in their residence halls, these facilities become their homes and should provide affirmation for their holistic selves. Beemyn and Rankin (2011) argued college campuses do not sufficiently support trans students.

Moody et al. (2018) describe how students sought to address their concerns in residence halls at American University. In the spring of 2013, American University hosted focus groups of students to provide feedback on the implementation and importance of an open-gender housing process for students living on campus. The focus groups and students on committees for residence life collaboratively created a pathway that implemented residence halls at American University that only had open gender options for students to select their roommate without limitations on the person's gender identity (Moody et al., 2018). The example set by American University shows how policies can be created not only for transgender student communities but with them.

Women's Colleges and Trans Students. Nanney's (2020) research discussed what it means to be transgender and nonbinary within a women's college. Her study emphasized while these colleges may claim they are friendly to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer (LGBTQ) students and applicants, it does not always mean they will be considered friendly to transgender people attending these schools. While there is a lack of addressing intersectional experiences such as trans women of color, women's higher education institutions may not create equity as they strive to do so (Nanney, 2020). Some women's colleges admit transgender students on a

case-by-case basis depending on how they define women according to their admissions policies. Other women's colleges have policies for admitting applicants based on the applicant's current identification as a woman or if they had previously identified as a woman to qualify as an applicant of their institution (Nanney & Brunsma, 2017). The different types of admission policies among women's colleges reflect the varying acceptance levels of trans applicants at colleges. While this study focused on the stories of transgender staff in higher education, discrimination can vary depending on the institution at which they are employed, such as a women's college.

Transgender Graduate Students. Whitley et al.'s (2022) research studied the experiences of transgender graduate students' being misgendered and harassed in higher education. Their study found among 23 cases of misgendering, over 65% occurred by faculty in the social sciences to graduate students in their departments. Additionally, 21% of trans graduate students reported being misgendered by their peers, and 13% reported misgendering by undergraduate students. Whitley et al. (2020) suggested more education needs to be done for faculty to serve transgender students. While this study represents the experiences of graduate students and power dynamics may be at play for discrimination and harassment with constant misgendering, participants in my study may experience similar misgendering from other staff and faculty colleagues.

Campus Climate for Transgender Community College Students. Data disaggregating from the Rankin et al. (2010) State of Higher Education national LGBTQ study was used to inform Garvey et al.'s (2015) study focused on the campus climate for LGBTQ community college students, including transgender participants. Among LGBTQ community college students, first-generation students in higher education found the campus climate at their

institutions to be less welcoming than their peers (Garvey et al., 2015). The classroom environment curated by faculty at community colleges significantly determined perceptions of the overall campus climate for trans college students due to a lack of curriculum on LGBTQ identities, and there is a lack of LGBTQ resources on campus. For example, when faculty engaged in homophobic discussions in the classroom, students found the campus climate to be more hostile. When faculty became advisors of students' LGBTQ student organizations, students reported feeling more comfortable on campus (Garvey et al., 2015). Whitehead (2019) found among LGBTQ community college students, there was scarce visibility among staff and faculty who support students in navigating the college. The visibility of other queer and transgender faculty and staff limited students' ability to create a community on campus. Although there was limited visibility on campus for LGBTQ people at community colleges, Whitehead (2019) found students used their social capital networks they did have to provide resources to one another and gain basic needs such as mental health support and emotional support when deciding to come out to people in their lives.

Transgender Staff and Faculty

Unfortunately, there is little research on the experiences of transgender faculty and staff reporting discrimination in higher education. Therefore, the section focusing on faculty and staff experiences is limited. Sterett (2018) conducted a study looking at research on discrimination and sexual harassment in higher education and found that six studies included trans discrimination. At the same time, Sterett found the research focusing on transgender people included the use of public gendered facilities and sexual harassment of trans people in higher education. While these themes may occur in my study, the focus is not necessarily on gendered

public facilities or sexual harassment. Still, gendered facilities may be spaces in which staff and faculty experience discrimination.

Siegel's (2019) study focused on the phenomenon and outcomes of the disclosure of one's transgender identity, their own transgender communities, resources, and career-level support in higher education. Siegel (2019) utilizes the concept of *microclimates* to understand better how transgender people experience affirmation and discrimination at their institutions. *Microclimates* are small environments such as a residence hall or department at a college that have their own culture and social expectations (Acklesburg et al., 2009).

Transgender people in higher education experience various levels of safety and comfort within *microclimates* that can impact their comfort of being out. For example, Siegel (2019) suggests transgender faculty, staff, and students may disclose their identity to others who are transgender but may not feel similarly comfortable sharing their gender identity with cisgender people. Similarly, Jourian et al. (2015) found there are conversations about transgender scholars *passing*. Some transgender people have a sense of being invisibilized due to their ability to pass, which can erase their experience of being transgender. Jourian et al. (2015) also found there is internalized transphobia that causes feelings of discomfort around being 'transgender enough' in transgender spaces, which creates comparisons to other transgender people. The concepts of passing and being 'transgender enough' are essential considerations in my dissertation because these concepts arise in the findings chapter of the study.

Sérrano and Gonzalez (2023) describe the complexity of being 'too queer' and 'too trans' in departmental and academic spaces in higher education when cisgender and heterosexual people feel uncomfortable by their mere existence in meetings, classrooms, and programs. They both described the anxiety and mental gymnastics that occur when confronted with blatant

disregard for their gender or sexuality through misgendering, invisibilization, and refusal to respect their pronouns. An internal struggle occurs by authors (Sérrano & Gonzalez, 2023) questioning one's gender expression by being 'too much' for cisgender and straight people to handle both as staff and graduate students in higher education.

Pitcher's (2020) research described the experiences of transgender faculty in higher education and posits that discussions of gender equity of faculty exclude transgender people. Research findings from Pitcher's study of gender equity among transgender faculty discussed the experiences of transgender faculty being read in multiple ways due to their gender non-conformity or the lack of their existence falling within the socially acceptable binary gender. While being misgendered can be problematic, one participant in Pitcher's (2015) study discussed how being read as multiple and different genders provided critical knowledge of the invisibility of transgender people in discussions of pay equity or leave benefits by higher education institutions.

There is no explicit research focused on the experiences of people who are gender fluid in academic settings. However, there is a rampant discussion of gender equity when concerns arise regarding cisgender women. Pitcher (2020) argues data collected on transgender people, such as their change in gender marker or change in name in higher education, creates an environment and perception of surveillance and gate-keeping, such as in human resources in higher education organizations.

Pitcher's (2017) study also focused on the experiences of transgender academics in higher education and the different microaggressions that happen to them. They found five different types of microaggressions experienced by transgender faculty: being misgendered, (mis)recognition, tokenization, mispronouncing, and being an impossible person to exist or work

with. The participants in the study (Pitcher, 2017) shared stories of classmates misgendering them as graduate students and the challenges of changing their name in graduate school and having classmates refuse to use their new name. Additionally, some transgender faculty found their colleagues did not use correct pronouns and intentionally refused to use the correct pronouns altogether.

Pitcher's (2017) findings posit transgender people being impossible meant while transgender faculty existed, they were unable to actually live as transgender people (hence being impossible) due to the organizational processes and policies that contributed to their experience of administrative violence. The violence experienced by transgender faculty was the inept human resources forms which did not allow for a straightforward process of changing a name or gender marker or being placed on administrative leave once they disclosed their transgender identity to administrators at the institution (Pitcher, 2017). Many participants also shared their experience of being tokenized by colleagues who would overemphasize their support for their trans colleagues, such as telling them they are privileged to have an office on the same floor as a transgender faculty. Some participants described the experience as synonymous with being gawked at like a zoo animal in tokenization interactions.

The research previously discussed in this section elaborates on the experiences of transgender staff, students, and faculty. As shown previously, there is a dearth of research on the experiences of transgender students, which includes managing their disclosure of identities, the importance of specific spaces for transgender people on college campuses, and problems that arise in gendered colleges. Transgender faculty and staff experience harassment and discrimination regarding gendered facilities in the workplace, some support from colleagues, and

the level of outness they need to manage. The next section discusses the specific experiences of transgender staff and faculty of color in higher education.

Transgender Staff and Faculty of Color

Among a critical review of articles that discuss workplace harassment of staff in higher education, Henning et al. (2017) found only one study that included the experiences of transgender staff in higher education, let alone focusing on the experiences of transgender staff of color in higher education. A significant amount of the research found by Henning et al. (2017) focused on the experiences of cisgender queer people and focuses on sexual harassment. As discussed previously, there is limited research on the experiences of trans staff and, arguably, faculty. Delgado-Romera et al. (2007) described research on the recruitment and retention of Latino/a faculty, whereas much of the research on faculty recruitment includes the gendered language of *Latino/a*. Additionally, Delgado-Romera et al. (2007) stated:

One aspect of Latino/a faculty experience is that virtually absent from the research literature is the experience of Latino/a lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (L-LGBT) faculty...Often, ethnicity becomes the sole focus of the L-LGBT faculty member's identity expression...[they] have to contend with heterosexism and homophobia in the job search and work setting. (p. 43)

While the terms used by Delgado-Romera et al. (2017) are arguably outdated (e.g., transgendered), their points show the potential challenges experienced by transgender Latinx/a/o faculty when applying for faculty positions, and the same could arguably be the experience of transgender Latinx/a/o staff as well.

While a focus on ethnicity for recruitment is important for institutions to consider, it can create erasure of other identities candidates have. In terms of Black faculty and staff, Jones'

(2020) research focused on the invisibilization and experiences of Black transgender women and transgender femmes in higher education. Jones found not only do staff and faculty need to mentor transgender students of color, there is a need for literature in higher education about the experiences of Black and other people of color who are transgender faculty and staff. Jones (2020) argued the need for literature arises from the demand for more research on faculty and staff who are Black and transgender since their experiences of discrimination and invisibilization can be like Black transgender students.

Antiblackness in Higher Education

The findings of this dissertation, as further described in the Findings chapter, show the need for awareness and explicit research on antiblackness within the transgender staff of color community. I implore the need for antiblack discourse and provide research on antiblackness and the experiences of Black students with antiblackness. Jackson et al. (2022) described *antiblackness* in education as being the creation of an afterlife of school segregation to theorize antiblackness in schools and the state of trauma and violence against Black students and children (ross, 2020). Antiblackness in higher educational institutions was built through the literal building of colleges and universities such as Yale from the labor of enslaved Africans and indigenous people and the manifestation of antiblackness as an ideology that is currently described as plantation politics in higher education (Wilder, 2013). Dancy et al. (2018) describe plantation politics and athletics in higher education as a way that colleges and universities profit off Black bodies and labor, which perpetuates colonialism in higher education. Building upon the plantation politics, queer Blackness and transness in higher education notes, similarly to the decolonial trans* of color critique (Salas-SantaCruz, 2021) framework, that white transgender studies exclude Black transgender and queer identities, which fail to address antiblackness.

Jackson et al. (2022) discussed the importance of educating researchers and practitioners to take antiblackness seriously.

Abrica et al. (2020) found Black students experience antiblackness at Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) because of settler colonialism. While HSIs are important to engage with the retention and success of Latinx/a/o students (Garcia, 2018), there is an increase in HSIs, and settler colonialism in higher education perpetuates antiblackness. Black students at HSIs experience invisibilization and hypervisibility due to their Blackness in many ways. They are not called on in class, are not taken as seriously as their non-Black peers, and combat stereotypes associated with their race. All of which leads to isolation or dismissal of intellect (Abrica et al., 2020). While researchers overseeing the study of antiblackness in HSI community colleges did not describe physical violence as a form of antiblackness, participants felt unsafe when Black Lives Matter posters were taken down or written on with a replacement of ‘All’ instead of ‘Black’ on the posters which felt threatening. The instances of antiblackness in higher education, and the challenging experiences of transgender staff, faculty, and students should be addressed by institutions of higher education. The next section describes the ways that colleges and universities attempt to combat discrimination and support diversity and equity.

Addressing Discrimination in Higher Education

Higher education and organizations claim to seek to intervene and stop discrimination on college campuses. Attempts to prevent or limit acts of discrimination include implementing policies on college campuses and organizations, including implicit bias training, education about marginalized communities, non-discrimination policies, and bystander intervention programs which do not adequately address bias and discrimination (Applebaum, 2019; Dass & Parker,

1999; Beauregard et al. 2018). In this section, I elaborate on the use of programs, policies, and non-discrimination policies by higher education institutions and organizations.

Performativity and Nonperformativity

Ahmed (2012) described the concept of ‘nonperformativity’ by institutions, including the institutional statements and rhetoric that do not change or affect their intended purpose. The term nonperformativity has been described by Ahmed (2006) as speech or statements that successfully act upon what is stated. As Dirks (2016) described, the purpose of creating policies is to only placate the needs of marginalized people and does not actually resolve the issues. For example, policies are created or written to address feedback from transgender people who may not have any policy ‘protections.’ If higher education institutions create such policies, those policies may be nonperformative, meaning they do not actually function in a way that creates change. If there is no intention to create change or follow through with accountability when policies are broken, then there are no resolutions to the discrimination taking place. Ahmed’s (2021) research exemplified the inequitable structures of reporting discrimination or complaining in higher education. People reporting discrimination and harassment need to research how and where to submit a complaint, which can be an obstacle to complaining in the first place. Participants in Ahmed’s (2021) study described the challenges of knowing the reporter’s procedures. One student in Ahmed’s study stated:

It’s just like a mess of documents and this back and forth and all this paperwork and me writing these seven pages, seventeen-page letters itemizing the failures of the university and them just writing the same letter back in response. (p. 33)

This type of labor can inhibit a student from reporting discrimination since they need to convince the administrator who will read their statement and proof of discrimination as if they are untruthful.

Kimura (2014) also posited while institutions attempt to address diversity and equity by enrolling students from diverse backgrounds and more students of color, enrolling such students does a disservice if the institution does not reflect on how to support diverse student populations. Kimura (2014) provided examples of non-performativity, such as not providing childcare or being mindful of the time constraints of students who need to take public transportation to attend college. Students are left to create micro-communities and lean on one another or their families to survive in academia. Students cannot rely on the institution to support them as underrepresented students in higher education, such as student parents.

Non-performativity (Kimura, 2014) is when institutions implement policies and procedures that are seemingly equitable yet do not provide the same level of access or servitude to students, staff, and faculty who are marginalized as those who are more privileged. The idea of non-performativity arose through the interviews in this study since there was a focus on the experiences of trans staff of color who reported discrimination.

The hidden obstacles created through policies and procedures reporting discrimination limit who reports discrimination to the university (Kimura, 2014). Barriers and the tedious nature of reporting discrimination at a university create a burden and affect the reporter. People who report discrimination, such as transgender staff who are already marginalized, need to do even more labor to convince administrators of their experiences of discrimination. Ahmed (2021) described the policies and procedures of reporting discrimination as being created ‘in-house,’ which inadvertently makes them, in Audre Lorde’s (1984) term, *the master’s tools*. The master’s

tools are when oppressed people use the same methodology and tools for liberation that are the same as the tools oppressors use to continue oppression.

Policymakers need to understand how policies and processes of reporting discrimination can create more barriers and retraumatize, more than necessary, the most marginalized people, such as transgender staff. Understanding the stories of transgender staff reporting discrimination in higher education is conducted through a transgender lens and critique (Spade, 2015), allowing policymakers to recognize the impact of such processes.

Ineffective Use of and Opinion on Policies

Human resources research suggests when organizations respond to ‘diversity,’ they respond in one of three ways: reactive, defensive, or proactive responses (Dass & Parker, 1999). Organizations attempt to address how workplaces support transgender employees by including staff training, human resources forms including multiple gender options, and education on concepts of gender (Beauregard et al., 2018). Dass and Parker (1999) provided an example of one way of stopping workplace discrimination through the threat of litigation to the organization to impact inclusion in the workplace for marginalized populations.

Organizations and Non-Discrimination Policies

Research suggests policies—when included on a website for an organization or the inclusion of different gender identities—can signal to potential employees that the organization has respect and inclusion for trans people (Beauregard et al., 2018). As a researcher, I considered this ‘signal’ such as websites highlighting the inclusion of transgender people insufficient to address discrimination issues and the needs of trans people in their institutions. As Nicolazzo et al. (2017) and Siegel (2019) argue, non-discrimination policies can be created to protect transgender people, but are not necessarily based on achievable outcomes due to the policies

being limited to just verbiage, rather than actual action for accountability. Later in this literature review, I expand on how higher education has attempted to address inequities and discrimination. Employers may not necessarily care about the trans individual themselves as a person, just the optics they create for the organization.

Dirk (2016) studied the policies at large public higher education institutions and found gender identity and gender expression in non-discrimination policies created deficit perceptions of transgender people. More often, due to the policies Dirk (2016) studied, trans people were perceived as victimized. The words, phrases, and normative assumptions on gender identity and expression in campus policies, state legislation, and use of language by non-discrimination policies sets the tone for who is considered valid at their institution. Dirk (2016) found non-discrimination policies protecting gender identity and gender expression portrayed transgender people as vulnerable and perpetuated tropes and stereotypes of victimization. They found institutions perpetuated deficit and negative stereotypes of trans people being only victims, which does not allow for transgender people to be seen as humane or a holistic person.

Dirk (2016) found one institution's committee recommended a policy that required transgender students to be isolated and segregated in their housing area, which only perpetuated stereotypes of transgender people. The committee's recommendation of segregating transgender students in university housing perpetuates stereotypes that transgender people are an "object of cisgender anger, aggression, and violence" (Dirk, 2016, p. 382). Dirk (2016) asked, "If these policy changes are based on a discourse of trans vulnerability, what are campuses accomplish? Are they simply reinforcing genderism in the guise of transgender inclusion?" (p. 388). The questions Dirk posed are consequential to understanding *how* policies are created and *how* they are being framed. While institutions may have the best intentions of creating trans inclusion in

policies, how these policies are interpreted or enacted perpetuates unnecessary stereotypes of transgender people. Organizations should use tenants of *trickle-up policies* to inform how policies are decided and the included content.

Actions, Perceptions, and Opinions on Gender-Affirming Policies

Goldberg et al. (2019) found while some higher education institutions may have gender-inclusive policies, many students are unaware these policies even exist. Solely having policies does not promote a sense of belonging or affirmation for trans students. Many transgender students are unaware their institution provides gender-inclusive housing and facilities on campus. Additionally, cultural norms—such as religiously affiliated institutions—must be considered since their policies may differ from secular institutions. The researchers found campus administrators must increase education and awareness about trans-inclusive policies on college campuses. Finally, transgender students must be active in policy development and discourse since genderism disproportionately impacts them.

There are examples of transgender students advocating for their rights for gender-inclusive policies on college campuses. Collier et al. (2018) discussed a situation at a college student housing facility that needed to change policies to be more transgender affirming. Through the advocacy of Roosevelt University's student government, students passed a resolution to call for the residence life department to create gender-inclusive housing for students, which caused the development of a Gender Neutral Task Force tasked to address concerns that arose for transgender students. The task force included students from student government and had transgender students' feedback created and implemented policies for gender-inclusive housing options, ratified by university leadership in 2013.

Flores et al. (2018) examined the level to which Americans support legal protections for transgender people nationally and the freedom for businesses to discriminate against transgender people. The researchers (Flores et al., 2018) found 48% of the United States public supports laws to protect transgender people from job discrimination, and 44% of people believe laws should protect transgender people from public accommodation discrimination. Although there is support for workplace and public accommodation protections for transgender people, Flores et al. (2018) found only 37% of people disagree businesses should be able to discriminate against transgender patrons. Twenty-five percent believe businesses should be able to discriminate against transgender people based on religious beliefs. While higher education institutions may have non-discrimination policies to protect transgender people, the lack of support may still lead to transgender people experiencing discrimination in higher education regardless of policy protections.

While nondiscrimination policies are generally perceived to be positive movement toward the progress and protection of transgender people, Spade (2015) argued those same nondiscrimination policies and campaigns do not address the concerns of improving the lives of transgender people who are supposed to be protected by the policies. Also, while there are growing gaps in social class and systemic racism, it is unclear whether nondiscrimination policies will protect people when hate crime laws failed to do so in the past. Since laws act retroactively, this may not necessarily prevent bias incidents from occurring and the murdering of trans people, let alone transgender people who cannot access competent legal assistance (Spade, 2015). Therefore, there must be much caution when considering the ability of nondiscrimination and gender-inclusive policies to resolve the harm and violence that transgender people face in higher education.

Bystander Intervention

Bystander intervention can be a positive and potentially influential part of addressing discrimination when it occurs. As Darley and Latané (1968) found in early studies, people were less likely to assume responsibility for addressing conflict or intervene when someone needs help when multiple people witness someone in need. Yu's (2023) study examined sex discrimination in the workplace among federal employees and bystander intervention to see if people would report incidents of discrimination. Yu (2023) found employees with seniority in agencies and older employees with supervisory responsibilities were more likely to report workplace discrimination. Yu (2023) also found bystander apathy from employees who felt nothing would be done to address the discrimination, feared negative consequences if they reported, and did not trust the organization would help them. Therefore, some participants did not choose to report discrimination because of a lack of trust within the organization, either due to doubt there would be a positive outcome or concern for their employment. The following section discusses how higher education has attempted to address discrimination and offers insight into the importance of this study.

Support Systems for Transgender People in Higher Education

While arguably, the systemic oppression and colonialism of higher education excludes transgender people of color, the experiences of transgender people surviving the academy include creating support systems for one another. As will be described in the findings chapter of this dissertation, support systems for transgender staff of color reporting discrimination in higher education have a positive impact on the co-creators who reported discrimination with support from friends and colleagues. Therefore, I provide examples of research that describes the usefulness of transgender people having support systems in higher education.

Duran et al. (2020) encouraged the use of an intersectional lens when addressing the needs and support for queer and trans students on college campuses, which reflects the framework of the decolonial trans* of color critique (Salas-SantaCruz, 2021). While not exclusively focused on the experiences of transgender students of color in higher education, Nicolazzo's (2016) research posits transgender college students create their ecosystem of support through their peer networks and the creation of spaces they can have to exist outside of compulsory heterogenderism merely. Nicolazzo (2016) discusses the use of kinship networks, which she defines as a close group of peers who:

- recognized and honored participants' gender identities, expressions, or embodiments;
- provided a refuge from the cultural realities of gender binary discourse and compulsory heterogenderism on campus; and
- acted as a potential site for participants to use to resist or push back against systemic trans* oppression if they choose." (p. 123)

While kinship networks were not exclusively transgender, students found the spaces uplifting and necessary to be in trans-specific spaces with one another to have support. The research discussed in this section is specific to transgender college students; the co-creators in the dissertation study also discuss the important role that support systems play in their experience of reporting discrimination in higher education as transgender staff of color. The next section describes the importance of using diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice research to inform practices and policies to address issues such as those experienced by transgender staff of color in higher education.

Higher Education and Use of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Research

Patton et al. (2019) completed a fifty-year review of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) initiative research in higher education from 1968-2018. They found the research focused on student support services, curricular initiatives, administration and leadership initiatives, and institutional policy initiatives. The study aimed to understand the institutional response to DEIJ initiatives and examine the research on these issues. Researchers found only 2% of the articles from 1968-2018 addressed and focused on DEIJ initiatives. While this study did not necessarily focus on an initiative per se, there is limited information on such studies that explore the staff perspective in higher education and discuss the use of discrimination policies related to gender identity.

As Patton et al. (2019) discussed, much of the response to student protests and movements are DEIJ initiatives that may not necessarily be based on research, as there are very few studies. Therefore, a study such as this is critical to understanding the experiences of transgender staff since policies on discrimination based on gender identity may not be founded on the research itself. Additionally, Patton et al. (2019) argued organizations appear to be engaged in understanding and tackling discrimination and oppression yet need to be more active and conduct initiatives that are unlikely to be effective. Patton et al. (2019) stated, “Although focusing on students and curriculum is critical, the lack of attention on administration, leadership, and policy may divert responsibility away from institutional leaders to conduct deeper examinations of how existing structures promote ongoing oppression...” (p. 190). Therefore, the lack of research on institutional policies and foundations of how to implement them causes a critical necessity for my study to provide a greater perspective on the experiences of trans staff who report discrimination.

Dilevko (2019) conducted research on the virtue-signaling of colleges and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in the wake of the 2015 Religious Freedom Restoration Act (2015) in Indiana, during which businesses could discriminate against patrons based on their religion. According to Dilevko (2019), virtue-signaling is when people or groups recognize or repute their support of ideals that make them better than others if they support progressive movements, such as changing a social media profile picture to a pride flag during Pride Month in June or the practice of corporations selling rainbow items during Pride Month. While Dilevko argued the NCAA preaches inclusivity, the move to stay in Indiana for the NCAA tournament for the Final Four indicates a lack of inclusivity. Criticism from sportscasters critiqued higher education, and opinions shared disapproved of the NCAA becoming involved in discussions of inclusivity in higher education and just focusing on college sports (Dilevko, 2019). This example of the effects of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (2015) in Indiana and the response from a collegiate organization depicts the virtue signaling that occurs for transgender people in higher education.

Applebaum (2019) researched the mandatory training of implicit bias on college campuses and argues that it protects against ignorance rather than eliminating it. Applebaum studied microaggression education in higher education because training is used to mitigate discrimination in higher education and believes this does not address the underlying discrimination issues. Applebaum (2019) stated there are debates about the effectiveness (or lack of) of mandatory Implicit Bias Training (IBT). Applebaum (2019) of this training due to the assumption people can change their behavior willfully once they become aware of the harm it causes. There are various trainings meant to tackle issues of inclusion and equity offered in higher education, such as the Implicit Bias Training. But, these do not address the cultural

changes needed to eradicate discrimination in higher education training does not address the cultural changes needed on college campuses. While attempts of training to undo or lessen transphobia and cisnormativity discrimination continue to persist for transgender staff, faculty, and students.

My research creates continual dialogues about how the stories and lived experiences of transgender staff reporting discrimination highlight the needs of transgender people in higher education. While higher education administrators may attempt to create policies and procedures with the best intentions of supporting transgender people of color in the workplace or students, some influential stakeholders are out of their control. For example, an institution may have nondiscrimination policies but fails to adequately investigate instances of transphobia or blatant discrimination because of the concern of making cisgender people feel uncomfortable. Additionally, as described in the findings chapter of my dissertation, there can be protocols and policies that state discrimination against transgender people is not tolerated. Still, if a transgender staff member's report of discrimination is not believed, the policies are useless.

Researchers (Connanier & Burke, 2019) found the governmental policies and the governor's political affiliation of a state impact the experiences of transgender people in the workplace in that specific state. With the impending presidential and national elections in November 2024, there is more at stake in United States politics to impact transgender employees more than ever before. Researchers (Connanier & Burke, 2019) found of 18,000 transgender people in the United States, those who were living in states with a Democratic governor and liberal legislature "...have an 18 percentage point (or 26 percent) higher likelihood of being employed in the 2008 survey, but a 16.4 percentage point (or 25 percent) lower likelihood of being employed in the 2015 survey" (p. 798). Regardless of the changes in different years from

one year to another in the same state employment rates, the transgender people in more Republican lead states had a lower level of employment. A correlation between a higher number of state protection policies and a percentage of higher employment of transgender people was found to be more positive with a Democratic governor and state legislator. Therefore, while the experiences of co-creators in this dissertation study vary, their experiences may also be attributed to the state in which they are inhabiting and employed when they have reported discrimination. The research in this study is guided by a conceptual framework that examines the multiple layers and holistic humanity of transgender staff of color who report discrimination in higher education, which will be introduced in the next section.

Conceptual Framework

Using qualitative research (Merriam, 2014) for this study, I adopted Salas-SantaCruz's (2021) decoloniality for a trans* of color educational critique to ascertain the experiences of transgender staff of color when reporting discrimination. Trans* of color critique in education uncovers the perpetuation of colonial concepts of gender, including within transgender studies. An essential component of decoloniality and trans* of color educational criticism (Salas-SantaCruz, 2021) is the remembering and collective memory of calling upon the epistemological and methodological understandings of gender and sexuality outside of white queer and transgender theory in education and the relationship with critical Indigenous and Women of Color Theories (Alexander, 2002).

Taking up space and viewing theories of gender from a lens such as Salas-SantaCruz's (2021) critiques of what white transgender studies and theories overlook provide an opportunity to understand barriers and limitations of transness that can be upheld by white supremacy. As Salas-SantaCruz noted, ways of knowing transness and gender by white transgender studies

create silos of experiences of transness. In contrast, this study examined the experiences of transgender people of color to create nuanced understandings of gender that are different than Westernized views perpetuated by higher education. The following section describes the framework, tenants of the framework, and application to the study.

Decoloniality & Trans* of Color Educational Criticism

Salas-SantaCruz (2021) discussed the foundation of decoloniality and trans* of color educational criticism stemming from Lugones' (2007) colonial and modern gender system, which calls for an interrogation of power and knowledge that dictates the history of gendered bodies and regulation of resistance. According to Salas-SantaCruz (2021), the policing and power of what gender histories are told can be perpetuated by white trans studies, such as the erasure of Indigenous people's experiences of gender pre-colonialism. Therefore, decoloniality and trans* of color educational criticism addresses this...

by pointing out the Eurocentric knowledge about transness that frames policy, curriculum, and practice. Second...offers a critical genealogy for modern transness...by making central the complexity of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) life...makes central the pedagogies of resistance and coalition among trans* of color and other non-dominant groups. (p. 2-3)

Salas-SantaCruz's framework created a critical analysis I used to understand how co-creators in the study described their experiences of reporting discrimination in higher education as transgender staff of color. Since the study for my dissertation focuses on the experiences of transgender staff of color reporting in a white supremacist institution and when colonial norms broadly define notions of transness, this framework provides a specific critique and lens to analyze the transcripts from the interviews I conducted.

Women of Color and Indigenous Critique center brown bodies as “pedagogical tools and means to knowledge, healing, decolonization, and wholeness” (Salas-SantaCruz, 2021, p. 4), which provide critical analysis of policies, curriculum, and literature in educational institutions (Cruz, 2001; Cruz * McLaren, 2002; Driskill, 2011). Salas-SantaCruz’s (2021) framework and researchers (Alarcón, 1994; Lugones, 2003, 2007; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983) discuss by centering the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and other people of color in research and as an analytical lens of research using decoloniality and trans* of color, educational criticism embraces the sociality of the body (Salas-SantaCruz, 2021) and limitations of categorical logic of identity.

Lugones (2003) described sociality as, “The sociality we would like to elicit is one that responds with its movements, a sociality that is formed rather than coerced or presupposed” (p. 37). Salas-SantaCruz (2023) argued the sociality of the body is how the body of people of color does not fit the prescribed assumptions of gender colonialism constructs or the assumed notions of gender that exclude the experiences of people of color who are transgender. The sociality of the body is also the actual or figurative space in which the body takes up that can include the social positioning within a specific community or culture, such as Latinx trans people who exist as products of colonialism that may or may not conform at that moment to their social sphere.

The decolonial framework allows for a more fluid understanding of the lived experiences of people in higher education who may have multiple experiences of being othered in academia. Jotería studies (Muñoz, 2006; Bañales, 2014) centralized the experiences of the Latinx and indigenous people who divert from the binary colonial understandings of gender and sexuality, such as those imposed on indigenous peoples by colonizers and focus more on indigenous people’s experiences of gender and sexuality (Driskill, 2016; Hames-García, 2014; Pérez, 2014). Joteria studies created decolonial resistance and dialogue for queer and transgender Latinx

people's ways of knowing through the body, space, and sociality of existing as a brown Latinx queer and transgender person (Alvarez, 2014; Caraves, 2020). For example, Latinx people have reclaimed the term Joto—a term used to describe what would be considered the term faggot in English as a derogatory term to mean someone who does not conform to oppressive conformity of gender or sexuality in the Latinx culture.

Analysis of Decoloniality & Trans of Color Educational Criticism

The decoloniality & trans* of color educational criticism (Salas-SantaCruz, 2021; 2023) is a thoughtful and insightful conceptual framework that significantly added to the research for this dissertation. While I appreciated and used this framework for the research on the experiences of transgender staff of color in higher education and reporting discrimination, I yearned for more discussion on not only anti-Blackness described in the framework (Salas-SantaCruz, 2021).

Within the foundational understanding of antiblackness from Black Crit (Dumas, 2018), there is no explicit discussion of colorism. As a non-Black person of color who is Latinx and acknowledging my privilege, I found it important to include concepts of anti-Blackness and colorism in not only the conceptual framework I used, but also in the analysis of findings of the study and how colorism may play a role in how transgender staff of color experience reporting discrimination. Salas-SantaCruz (2021) discussed including Jotería studies (Bañales, 2014) and does not describe problematic colorism within Latinx/a/o communities.

Fuentes et al. (2021) conducted a study that measured skin tones and attitudes towards them in the Latinx community, which showed that Black Latinx people viewed their skin as less satisfactory compared to lighter skin in non-Black Latinx people, which was also associated with higher rates of depression and impacted lower self-esteem among Black Latinx children. Fuentes et al. (2021) found the socialization of what is deemed as acceptable and more positive—such as

Latinx people with lighter skin tones—impacted the self-perception and value of the person within the Latinx community.

Rationale/Application to the Study

The decoloniality & trans* of color educational criticism (Salas-SantaCruz, 2021; 2023) provides a lens ideal for the study framework due to the interconnected discourse of the specific and unique experiences of transgender people of color in education. As Salas-SantaCruz (2023) argued, the identities of being a person of color and transgender cannot be siloed. Crenshaw (1989) described a point at which identities intersect. Still, Salas-SantaCruz (2021) argued intersecting identities are integrated parts of the whole person. My own experiences of discrimination as a transgender staff of color in higher education were—as a whole—a combination and not a singular experience of being either transgender or a person of color when my aggressor—a white cisgender woman—used terms such as “aggressive.” Such terms could not solely be used to describe my trans masculinity or my Latinx identity as a brown person. The conceptual framework (Salas-SantaCruz, 2021) discussed the issues of white transgender studies, which solely discuss transgender-ness as a solo and singular experience that may be true for white transgender people and yet does not speak to the experience of Black, brown, and indigenous or other transgender people of color when the term transgender itself may not resonate with their own lived experiences.

This literature review provided definitions and examples of terms defined early in the chapter and were used throughout the study's research. It also provided explanations of key concepts related to gender, race, and ethnicity. Important topics that come about in the findings of the dissertation, such as transmisogynoir, antiblackness, and ways in which policy inadequately addresses discrimination experienced by transgender people in the workplace and

higher education were addressed. The chapter also provided context for the study by describing what contributes to discrimination against transgender people in general and the workplace, as well as what causes people to report discrimination, the fears of reporting discrimination, and experiences of discrimination against trans people in higher education. Finally, the literature review included strategies organizations and higher education institutions have attempted to use to deter discrimination that occurs and policies that ultimately are failures. The next chapter discusses the methodology used in the study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In the Spring of 2017, the situation at work took a turn. I felt isolated, confused, gaslit by the institution itself, and like I had no allies. I received the outcome of the investigation from the Office of Inclusion, Equity, and Compliance, which included that there were no findings in the discrimination investigation since it did not meet the legal threshold. The Respondent's wife corroborated the following evidence:

“Specifically, two individuals referred to your style as ‘aggressive,’ and others described you as ‘cantankerous,’ ‘abrasive,’ ‘unprofessional,’ and of ‘negative energy.’ Furthermore, the survey responses reflected that the attendees felt you did not promote a climate of open discussion overall. OEIC also considered Ms. Long’s statement (though recognizing the potential bias in favor of the Respondent as her wife) that she received complaints from student supervisors following your presentation (personal communication, p. 3, 2017).

This is an excerpt from the findings of a Title IX complaint I had submitted to my employer against a white cisgender woman who I found out later schemed with her wife to attempt to stop me from being able to do my job. I want to note that I prefaced the training that the survey results came from and that I was still processing the killings of Black people in recent days. That did not matter to the white cisgender participants in my training. This heartbreaking blow led me to continue to try to understand the stories of transgender people who have also reported discrimination, seeking some type of ‘justice’ for the harm they have experienced while exploiting themselves to the university.

The purpose of this dissertation was to understand the lived experiences of transgender staff of color who report discrimination in higher education. Co-creators in the study shared their experiences of reporting discrimination in higher education using semi-structured interviews in a basic qualitative study (Merriam, 2014) study. I used Salas-SantaCruz’s (2021) Decoloniality & Trans* of Color Educational Criticism as my conceptual framework to analyze the findings. This chapter provides information on the methodological framing, my positionality, informed consent, and methods for the study. The research question guiding this study was:

RQ: What are the stories and lived experiences of transgender staff who report discrimination in higher education?

Methodological Stance

Qualitative research allows participants to share their experiences and co-create knowledge with the researcher (Kim, 2016). My qualitative study centered on the voices and experiences of transgender staff of color in higher education using a constructivist qualitative research methodology (Merriam, 2014). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) share, “A central characteristic of all qualitative research is that individuals construct reality in interaction with their social worlds. Constructivism thus underlines what we are calling a basic qualitative study” (p. 24). They describe that the purpose of qualitative research is where researchers are interested in how people interpret their experiences, construct their world, and understand how people make sense of their lives. I provide a more holistic view of the participants' stories through semi-structured interviews, which will be described in detail in the following sections.

Qualitative Research

The purpose of selecting qualitative research is to focus on interpreting and understanding the experiences of people involved in the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, rapport was built with the transgender staff of color involved in the study, and I identified similarities in experiences based on the thematic findings (Chivanga & Monyai, 2021). I centered the voices of transgender staff of color in higher education because there is a lack of research specifically on transgender staff overall, let alone when it comes to reporting discrimination (Pitcher, 2017). Basic qualitative research allowed me to conduct semi-structured interviews to center marginalized voices and, thus, create knowledge of transgender futures (Cover, 1983). Therefore, the research focused on centering the voices of transgender staff of color in higher education and their lived experiences.

According to Holley and Harris (2019), the design of basic qualitative research does not draw solely from narrative or ethnographic traditions. Still, it relies on constructionism, “which suggests that individuals construct their unique versions of reality through their interaction with the world around them” (p. 107). Constructivist qualitative methodology situated this study on the lived experiences and stories of transgender staff of color who reported discrimination because “The focus on individual meaning-making in context is well-suited to distinct environments in which individuals live their lives, such as school, churches, neighborhoods, and work organizations” (Holley & Harris, 2019, p. 107). Given the people involved in this study work in higher education and their lived experiences, socialization and experiences reporting discrimination, basic qualitative research was an appropriate design to interpret what they share in their interviews. While semi-structured interviews are not averse to being problematized, as discussed below, they are an appropriate option for a basic qualitative research study.

Stewart (2022) notes, “Despite its power to subvert oppressive systems, researchers performing qualitative research methods do not inherently advance anti-oppressive goals and outcomes...” (p. 59). As a researcher, I evaluated the purpose of my research and reflected on my own identities, experiences, and privileges. While the research is focused on the experiences and stories of transgender staff of color who report discrimination, the study focused on desire rather than damage-controlled research, as Tuck (2009) argued. Damage-controlled research (Tuck, 2009) exclusively examines the atrocities and deficits of lived experiences that perpetuate the pathologization of marginalized (such as transgender) people of color. Damage-controlled research frameworks do not provide hope, desire, and opportunity for a co-existence of humanizing futures and historical oppression. One of the significant considerations of damage-controlled research documents the pain of communities and emphasizes the ‘lack of’ populations

that experience oppression. Therefore, my research discussed hope and transgender of color futures with the co-creators to embody a more humane and holistic understanding of transgender staff of color stories and experiences reporting discrimination.

Constructivist Paradigm

Crotty (1998) describes constructivism as the meaning attributed to realities in our world, which describes humans as being co-creators of their reality. The paradigm of constructivism is an interpretation and creation of reality from a human's understanding of their realities and perspective. Barkway (2001) describes that while constructivism includes a form of constructionism, "What is emphasized in constructionism, on the other hand, is individual persons do not primarily construct that meaning as they encounter phenomena one by one. Instead, it is socially constructed" (p. 193). As Barkway (2001) describes, Constructivism validates the experiences of individuals because their reality is how they make sense of the world, and culture can shape how one sees their world. The paradigm of constructivism is used in this dissertation study and applied to the questions asked of co-creators and illuminates their understanding of the world from their lived experiences.

Positionality

As a researcher conducting a constructivist (Crotty, 1998) qualitative research study, I described my positionality and relation to the research topic to be transparent about my biases contributing to this topic of study. As Kim (2016) notes, a researcher can be seen as a 'spy' among co-creators, and there is a need to acknowledge positionality and power dynamics that can come about, as well as biases. In this section, I describe my relationship to study and the lived experiences that inform my lens. I challenged myself to consider biases that come about throughout the research process.

My Topic and Me

During the Spring semester of 2016, at a former institution, I experienced discrimination and mismanagement from my supervisor. Today, words still ring in my head describing my work as her subordinate as ‘undermining’ her and perceiving me as ‘aggressive’ (personal communication, 2017). I served from October 2015 to May 2021 as the Coordinator of a Pride Center at a comprehensive regional university. I was frequently tokenized and called upon as the ‘expert’ of all things queer, trans, asexual, and questioning on campus for all faculty, staff, administrators, and students. My supervisor at the time was the previous permanent coordinator in my role at the Pride Center, who had a very different vision and expectations of how the space should be directed. My supervisor was a cisgender white queer woman who provided no direction, support, or empathy to my professional work and frequently regarded me as ‘aggressive.’ I never fully understood what it meant to have a healthy relationship with a supervisor.

Two years after I launched an investigation into her behavior—which found her to have violated union contracts and human resources deemed she engaged in unprofessional conduct—she still reminded me about how I reported her for discrimination based on gender identity, gender expression, and race. I had chosen to report and file a complaint of discrimination to the Office of Equity and Compliance (OEC) because of my positive relationship with the Title IX Coordinator at the time. The Title IX Coordinator was the only administrator on campus I completely trusted. Had I not had that type of relationship with her, I would not have shared my challenges and experiences of discrimination that concerned me professionally. I was immediately identified as the complainant in official investigation documentation during my first interview and when submitting the online discrimination report.

The white woman respondent made me want to hold her accountable even more because of the power dynamic between her identities and mine. In a private, one-on-one meeting, years after the case had been closed, she told me, "I keep you at arm's length because you are unpredictable. The investigation was the worst professional year of my career" (personal communication, p.1, 2019). What was I supposed to say or do at that moment? Was I to hold her guilt and emotions and comfort her? Her white and cisgender guilt about her behavior was no surprise; given her questioning behavior, I requested our department director to stop reporting to her as my supervisor immediately. This example has caused me to ask what the stories of trans staff of color who report discrimination are in higher education.

Another instance of harassment and discrimination occurred in 2019 by another coworker who was an older Latina cisgender heterosexual woman. I reported to the Office of Equity and Compliance about consistent and pervasive misgendering by a coworker in my department. The coworker had been misgendering me for over five years—since I began in my role—and I was at a point where I needed this behavior to be addressed since the coworker refused to adhere to the multiple director's corrections of her behavior. While she repeatedly misgendered me countless times, because I am Latinx and she was Latina, respectability politics with an elder came into play. She would seemingly be caught off guard at my correcting her misgendering of me, disappointed looks, and when I directly addressed her behavior as if she was my tía who could do no wrong.

The previous four department directors did not adequately address her behavior and seemingly swept it under the rug. After countless conversations reminding her of my pronouns and having coworkers and multiple directors set expectations, she continued misgendering me. I submitted a report and complaint to OEC. I met with the Associate Vice President and Title IX

Coordinator, who stated: “I don’t know what to do since she is refusing to meet with me, and this is not a formal investigation, so I cannot require her to come in.” (H.S., personal communication, 2019) The response from the Title IX Coordinator felt like a complete blow to my humanity, and I was at a loss for what I could do since that was my accountability option. If the Office of Equity and Compliance could not even meet with the person perpetuating my inhumanity, I thought to myself: What else could I do, or whom could I trust?

My expectations for the Office of Equity and Compliance went out of the window with the lack of commitment and assertive investigations I experienced with the prior Title IX Coordinator in 2016. I felt at a loss, did not seek further amendments, and was finally more at ease when the coworker retired. While my identities led me to mistrust cisgender white [queer] women, I wanted what would feel like ‘accountability’ for people’s actions in invalidating my existence. Ultimately, the lack of advocacy, a sense of understanding of transgender identities by Title IX officers, and failure to meet legal discrimination thresholds left me depleted and tired. My previous experiences of discrimination as a transgender staff of color at a university have led me to want to understand the lived experiences and stories of other transgender staff of color who report discrimination.

Application of Conceptual Framework

The decoloniality & trans* of color educational criticism (Salas-SantaCruz, 2021; 2023) provides a lens ideal for the study framework due to the interconnected discourse of the specific and unique experiences of transgender people of color in education. As Salas-SantaCruz (2023) argued, the identities of being a person of color and transgender cannot be siloed. Crenshaw (1989) described a point at which identities intersect. Still, Salas-SantaCruz (2021) argued intersecting identities are integrated parts of the whole person. My own experiences of

discrimination as a transgender staff of color in higher education were—as a whole—a combination and not a singular experience of being either transgender or a person of color when my aggressor—a white cisgender woman—used terms such as “aggressive.” Such terms could not solely be used to describe my trans masculinity or my Latinx identity as a brown person. The conceptual framework (Salas-SantaCruz, 2021) discussed the issues of white transgender studies, which solely discuss transgender-ness as a solo and singular experience that may be true for white transgender people but does not speak to the experience of Black, brown, and indigenous or other transgender people of color when the term transgender itself may not resonate with their own lived experiences.

As shown, Chapter Two provided definitions and examples of terms defined early in the chapter that are used throughout the study's research, and provides explanations of key concepts related to gender, race, and ethnicity. The literature review discussed important topics that come about in the findings of the dissertation, such as transmisogynoir, antiblackness, and ways in which policy inadequately addresses discrimination experienced by transgender people in the workplace and higher education. The literature review also provided context for the study by describing what contributes to discrimination against transgender people in general and the workplace, as well as what causes people to report discrimination, the fears of reporting discrimination, and experiences of discrimination against trans people in higher education. Additionally, the literature review included strategies organizations and higher education institutions have attempted to use to deter discrimination that occurs and policies that ultimately are failures. The next chapter discusses the methodology used in the study.

Research Design

Using a constructivist (Crotty, 1998) qualitative methodology, I sought to understand the experiences of transgender staff of color and their stories of reporting discrimination in higher education (Holley & Harris, 2019; Kim, 2016). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe the significance of a researcher's voice while conducting research as “a way to understand experience” (p. 21). For this study, I used a constructivist (Crotty, 1998) qualitative research design to understand the experiences of transgender staff of color reporting discrimination in higher education.

While using a constructivist qualitative methodology (Holley & Harris, 2019), I used Salas-SantaCruz's (2021) decoloniality and trans* of color educational criticism to unearth themes that may arise from the semi-structured interviews, as discussed in the findings chapter. Simultaneously, Stewart (2022) argued semi-structured interviews do not allow people to tell their whole truths since a normative interview format limits their ability to be fully heard. Further, Stewart (2022) posits that due to the hegemonic power dynamics of a researcher and participant relationship, researchers could perpetuate systemic exploitation and, therefore, should use anti-oppressive methodologies and make room for multiple ways of data collection. In this research, I strove to ensure a more equitable and humane research process as much as possible through triangulation with co-creators to review interview transcripts and data collected to accurately reflect their stories of reporting discrimination.

I included the integration of phronesis reflexivity as a researcher to provide more integrity and a more ethical research process (Kim, 2016). Phronesis is the human ability to conduct oneself ethically and intellectually virtuously while being sensitive to the context of situations (Dunne, 2005; Korthagen & Kessels, 1999). Additionally, phronesis requires researchers to reflect on their role in their research (Hertz, 1997). For example, I asked myself

during my study whether I was being ethical and examine my ethics and morals about what I asked in my interview protocol and how I facilitated the interviews. The selection criteria excluded people from participating in the study if they were in the processes or would be going through the processes of legal litigation with their current or former institutional employer. While I was aware of the exclusionary parameters set for the study limitations, I also found myself wondering what it would feel like ethically as a researcher if I were to be subpoenaed to share what the person told me in the interview for the dissertation study. I stayed conscious of my biases to avoid projecting my own experiences onto participants. I used ethical judgment.

Participant Selection

I used multiple sources to recruit and identify co-creators for the study and used purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) to find people who fit the specific criteria for the study. As shown below, I used Salas-SantaCruz's (2021) framework of decolonial trans* and queer of color critique to provide an affirming recruitment language that invites people to participate who meet the more culturally appropriate recruitment rather than recruiting white transgender people. The terms used in the recruitment language include multiple gender identities and terms used among communities of color to have co-creators who only fit a specific recruitment criterion but I was aware I was directly addressing people who may not have been accepted into white transgender studies research. I included the following criteria in a recruitment screening form to confirmed each person in the study met all the criteria below:

- 1) All participants must identify as any of the following: Jotx/o/a, AG, Stud, Two-Spirit, Masc-of-center, Mahu, Filipinx, Latinx/e, Femme-of-center, Femme, Masc, transgender
- 2) All participants must be any of the following: Black, Indigenous, Multiracial, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander or a Person of Color.

- 3) All participants should be current or former non-student staff members at a college or university. A staff member is defined as a director level or below in an organizational chart.
- 4) All participants should have previously reported a complaint of discrimination based on gender identity at their college or university workplace.
- 5) All reports of discrimination must have already completed any investigations related to gender identity discrimination without any current or ongoing litigation.

Given the criteria for eligibility to participate in the study, I used different sources to recruit co-creators, including social media, email list serves, and higher education associations. The recruitment advertising I used included LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and listservs, which included a description of the criteria, Institutional Review Board protocol number, and contact information. Through email listservs and email advertising, I used multiple professional networks in higher education for staff to recruit potential co-creators, which included: ACPA: College Student Educators International, CaCCCHE: California Council of Cultural Centers in Higher Education, The Consortium of Higher Education: LGBT Serving Professionals, NADOHE: National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education, NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, NCORE: National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in American Higher Education, and the email list serv College Student Personnel Talk.

Recruitment for the study included email solicitation and social media posts which were made public for easy shareability from my social media networks. I used the term *staff* to include full-time professionals from custodial staff to an institution's director and management level. My literature review further described the definition of the term staff used in this study. I provided a flier and description to include the Institutional Review Board approval, institutional information

from Colorado State University, and my Primary Investigator, Dr. Dockendorff's contact information for any questions or concerns. I included the recruitment email and other items in Appendix A, B, and C, which were approved for use by the Colorado State University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Co-creators also needed to be current or former staff at an institution of higher education where they have reported discrimination based on gender identity, which included and was not limited to administrative support staff, facilities, coordinator, director, associate director, program manager, assistant to an administrator in any division of the institution, or director (administrative, academic, student affairs, information technology, operations, etc.) in higher education. I met the desired number of co-creators in the study, with five transgender staff of color with many identities and professional roles.

Informed Consent

I provided documentation of informed consent from all study co-creators. I also sent follow-up emails to each person who could participate, clarifying the language and definitions used for recruitment to confirm eligibility and the time commitment required to participate fully. Additionally, I provided each co-creator with information on the ability to withdraw at any time without consequences, and the technological requirements of recording interviews on Zoom were provided. I kept all recordings, transcripts, and data on my computer in password-protected folders and used Dedoose (2023) software for data analysis.

Methods

In this section, I describe the procedure used to collect data for the study, which includes the interview protocol, data collection, data analysis process, trustworthiness of the research, limitations of the study, delimitations of the study,

Interview Protocol

After receiving IRB approval, I began soliciting via social networks, email list services, and professional organizations in higher education to recruit potential co-creators for the study. The initial screening form in Qualtrics (2024) was used to screen for potential co-creators who met the specific criteria. The screening form included demographic information, asked the potential candidates for the study to share what makes them interested in participating in the study and share their professional role, the institution where they reported discrimination, and confirm that the case had been closed for their discrimination report and that they are not undoing litigation procedures. Once I selected people to interview and participate in the study, I contacted each person to schedule a first interview and provided the informed consent documents required by the IRB. Upon receiving the completed consent forms, I confirmed their participation in the study, sent a calendar invite with the Zoom link, and recorded each interview in a secure, password-protected encrypted drive. Upon beginning each of the interviews, I introduced myself, shared what inspired me to conduct research focused on the experiences of transgender staff of color who report discrimination, and confirmed all IRB protocols and privileges, such as informed consent and the ability to remove themselves from the study at any time.

I conducted the first semi-structured interview to build rapport with the co-creator, explore who they were as a person, what their identities were, and how they began their professional career in higher education. The second interview delved into the experience of reporting discrimination; they described their discriminatory experiences, and shared what they would like to see done differently for people in similar positions, such as themselves.

Data Collection

Using basic qualitative research (Holley & Harris, 2019), I conducted two in-depth interviews with each of the five co-creators about their experiences through storytelling. Therefore, I had a total of ten interviews when I concluded data collection. While a group interview may have been a positive addition to the research, I wanted to protect the sensitivity of co-creators sharing their discriminatory experiences and not require them to disclose to others their own experiences since they may know their colleagues, supervisors, or others within the field of higher education. I was conscious of protecting their identities and privacy with what was shared. As a researcher, I strive to collaborate with co-creators to create intimacy and vulnerability in this study. An initial screening form was provided to all interested people to complete and to confirm eligibility, which is shown in Appendix F. After collecting respondents and reviewing the screening form, I then moved on to scheduling the first interviews based on availability once I determined each person was eligible to participate in the study.

The first interview was focused on getting to know the co-creator and building trust with them to share in dialogue with me. I prioritized questions asking the co-creators about themselves, the story of their identities of race and ethnicity, and gender identity. I also shared what prompted me to do my dissertation on this topic, as I had experienced discrimination in higher education as a transgender staff of color. In the interviews and to build rapport with the interviewees, I wanted to share the why behind the purpose of the study beyond research, but my ties to the topic. After sharing my reason why studying these experiences was important to me, the co-creators felt more relaxed and willing to share their own experiences. As a result, I did not seem as much like an outsider. I also asked about their experiences as a transgender staff of color or whichever term they used to describe themselves and asked about their experiences of reporting discrimination.

I used the second interview to include a discussion of the co-creator's experience of reporting discrimination, what support looked like for them, and the experience of what led to their reporting. I asked them to talk about the role of their race and ethnic identities in their experiences and their gender identities and the role they played in their experience of reporting discrimination. Lastly, during the second interview, I asked what they would want policymakers, administrators, and other staff to know based on their experience and if there is any additional information or clarification from the two interviews. I included the themes that came about through the interviews in the findings chapter and their recommendations for future practice in the final chapter of this dissertation. I purposefully limited the number of people in the study due to the longevity of multiple interviews and to provide a more humanistic and individual attentiveness to the relationships built through rapport.

Each interview was between twenty-five to seventy minutes. All interviews were conducted using the Zoom platform and recorded with consent for transcription use. Individual transcriptions of interviews were provided to each person to ensure accuracy and triangulation of feedback, which is a form of member checking (Birt et al., 2016). Birt et al. (2016) describe member checking as respondent validation for the people involved in the study to check for accuracy and the ability to provide feedback to the researcher who conducted the interview. Data were collected and stored in a password-protected computer, encrypted software, and folders on the computer, as well as the Dedoose database for data analysis. I kept the transcripts for several years for future projects and deleted all recordings after each co-creator reviewed and approved the transcriptions. The Principal Investigator, Kari Dockendorff, Ph.D., and I are the only people with access to all data and transcripts for the study.

Data Analysis

The data analysis method I used for the study was categorical aggregation (Creswell, 1998). After transcribing each interview, I uploaded each on the Dedoose (2024) software for analysis using thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006). I coded the data from interviews to construct themes. I coded accordingly and systemically labeled and grouped the codes. The process of analysis began after concluding interviews and after each interview was transcribed. I sent each co-creator the transcription of their interviews and sought feedback. None of the co-creators added content or amended any words in the transcripts and each approved via email the accuracy of each transcript. Upon receiving approval from each co-creator of their interview transcripts, I uploaded all transcripts into Dedoose software. I completed my initial round of review of each transcript. I took time to read interviews to take in all the content. I wrote memos to identify where my positionality was showing up in the analysis due to my experience reporting discrimination. I also included memos that brought about feelings of concern, dismay, and surprise at what the co-creators had shared about their experiences of reporting discrimination.

I then began to do one initial round of coding for each transcript. I added memos where needed if I was triggered, felt a moment of surprise, or had additional notes about a quote that I wanted to ensure I remembered. Given the research question of the dissertation study, I found the co-creators spoke about their lived experiences as transgender people of color in the United States, analyzed each one, and used the categorical aggregation technique (Cresswell, 1998) to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns seen within the data. From multiple coding of the data, I created categories within Dedoose for the initial coding themes that proved to be consistent in multiple interviews.

After the first set of codes, I created subcodes, then examined subcodes to create the third round of codes which are the thematic findings in the findings chapter of the dissertation. The codes include the perception of administrators who receive discrimination reports, societal influence that impacted how the co-creators exist in society, the support systems they utilized when reporting discrimination, and people's perception of them in higher education and everyday life. and used the paradigmatic mode of analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995) to understand the study's findings. The paradigmatic mode of analysis strategy stems from Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory, in which concepts are inductively derived from the data and discuss common emerging ideas or findings. The practice of using the paradigmatic mode of analysis allowed me to find any themes that came about in the interviews and to, in turn, concentrate on relationships of themes that arose in an effort to uncover any commonalities among the co-creators' stories.

Trustworthiness

While the ethics structures in research are rooted in colonialism due to being created because of anti-Black racism from the Tuskegee experiments (CDC, 2023), as a researcher, I did my best to conduct myself in a manner conducive to centering the co-creator's experiences. As Galvez and Muñoz (2020) state, "This is how theory in the flesh is practiced: assessing the messy parts of yourself" (p. 788). As I described in my positionality section, I stayed conscious of the messy parts of myself. I assessed when my identities and privileges influenced my data analysis or if I had to take time away from the data because it was overwhelming and personal to me. There is an entanglement of why I am performed this research. Trustworthiness was established through transparency with the co-creators by member checking (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), sharing with the co-creators the reasoning for engaging in this research, and receiving confirmation of their experiences I captured through the interviews via triangulation of

transcription. Each person in the study reviewed each of their transcriptions for verification and approval before the analysis of the data began. For the validity of the data and information collected, co-creators reviewed the transcripts of their own interviews and shared feedback with me on the results. I wanted to provide the co-creators with as much reflection as possible and be mindful of my reflexivity as a researcher.

Limitations & Delimitations of the Study

There were several limitations of the study that came about through the recruitment and overall co-creator demographics of the study. As will be discussed in chapter four, there was only one person who was involved in the study who identified as a transgender man and one person who, at the time of reporting discrimination, identified as genderfluid. The remaining people in the study identified as either transfeminine or transgender women. Another limitation of the study, as discussed previously, is the ineligibility of people who had been in the litigation process or were going to be in the litigation process with their current or previous employer where they reported discrimination. While the ethical component of why people who fell into that category were excluded is understandable, I cannot help but wonder what the findings would look like for the people who did seek out legal litigation based on their experiences. I plan to continue researching in the future, which may include people who have sought legal ramifications for the discriminatory behavior they received.

The delimitations for the study were to include transgender staff and have a limited number of co-creators to no more than five people. As noted in the literature review, I intentionally created parameters for the term staff. I modified the number of co-creators to correspond with the intimacy of qualitative research (Merriam, 2014) to build a relationship and rapport with the co-creators through multiple interviews. The study was informed by transgender

staff of color, conducted by a trans masculine Latinx researcher of color, and informs experiences reporting discrimination based on transgender people of color. Using Zoom for the interviews allowed for flexibility for co-creators who would otherwise not be accessible to interview.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics is a term rooted in colonialism, including the inception of higher education institutions (Galvez & Muñoz, 2020). In the article by Muñoz and Galvez (2020), *(Re)Imagining Anti-Colonial Notions of Ethics in Research and Practice*, Muñoz conducted a research project in which she assumed providing a pseudonym for co-creators was ‘protecting’ them and shared, “...participants felt like placing a pseudonym along with their narratives was an act of erasure...I thought about how the needs of participants are put aside in a checklist of ‘ethics’” (p. 785). In addition to reflexivity, co-creators in this study selected their own pseudonym and the pseudonyms for the campus at which they reported discrimination. While I would have liked co-creators to use their names, due to the sensitive nature of the research topic and potential legal concerns, I did not want to jeopardize their careers and create potential repercussions of discussing their experiences of discrimination. So, I used pseudonyms for each person and each college at which they were employed at the time of reporting discrimination. While I cannot control the Institutional Research Board process practice, the practice of having the co-creators choose to use their name is an example recommended by Galvez and Muñoz (2020) to relinquish the ‘control’ or idea that researchers need to ‘protect’ co-creators when they are autonomous. At its inception, ethics in research stemmed from oppressive, inhumane, and violent acts by people such as the Nazis and white people experimenting on Black people in the 20th century, leading

to informed consent and regulations in research (Ross, 2014; Thomas & Pettitt, 2017). Through triangulation, co-creators provided feedback and ensured the accuracy of the transcripts.

In alignment with ethical standards, as discussed previously, I obtained approval from the Institutional Research Board at Colorado State University prior to recruitment. While the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the research proposed, it is essential to note that Institutional Research Boards were created due to the National Research Act of 1974 to protect co-creators due to the aftermath and impact of the Tuskegee syphilis study in Alabama, which took place from 1932-1972 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023). Throughout the listening and conversations with co-creators, I took notes on the transcripts in Dedoose (2024) to be conscious of my privileged identity as a researcher, and when I noticed my own biases and own triggers of my experiences of reporting discrimination arose. As Kitchener (1985) discusses, I should not have a savior-like or paternalistic mentality when conducting research.

Summary

The methodology chapter outlines the steps took to complete the research, including my methodological stance, positionality, research design, descriptions of basic qualitative research methodology, data collection, data analysis, delimitations, limitations, and ethical considerations. The chapter also describes the ethical concerns of the research and where there can be an expansion in research for the future due to the limitations of this study. The next chapter describes each of the co-creators who were involved in the study and briefly describes their circumstances surrounding their reported discrimination.

CHAPTER 4: THE CO-CREATORS

Upon beginning recruitment for this research, I was concerned that I would not find people willing to be vulnerable and share their experiences of reporting discrimination. Little did I know that there was an influx of submissions, and I found the co-creators involved in the study to be more than willing to participate. I am indebted to these co-creators for trusting me to share their pain and what brings them hope, and I wanted to make sure their experiences were shared with others to learn from.

Chapter four describes the study's co-creators, their backgrounds, and what caused them to report discrimination. Each participant had been a staff member in higher education for multiple years and identifies as a transgender person of color who has reported discrimination. Table 1 below describes the demographic breakdown of each staff member participating in the study.

Table 1*Co-Creator demographics*

Name	Pronouns	Region	Title	Functional Area	Institution	Race, Ethnicity, & Gender
April	She/Her	Northeast	Assistant Director, Transgender Education	Multicultural Center	Atlantic State University	Multiracial-Filipina & Chicana, Genderfluid
CM	She/Her	Northeast	Deputy Counselor and Tutor	Student Success	The Valley State College	Black, Two Spirit
Corby	She/Her	South	International Admissions Officer	Admissions	Southern College	Black Haitian, Trans Femme
Fik	Shey/They	Northeast	Psychologist	Counseling Center	G University	Black Trans Woman
JA	He/Him	Midwest	Administrative Coordinator	Economics	Mountain College	Black Trans Man

Note. Description of Race, Ethnicity, and Gender are shown as described when reporting discrimination and may not be consistent with current lived experience.

Introduction to the Co-Creators

This section introduces the co-creators in the study, which details each participant's background and experiences in higher education. Each co-creator selected the pseudonyms for themselves, and each person created a name for the institution at which they reported discrimination. If they did not choose their own, they requested I create one. While descriptors of their lived experiences and stories of reporting discrimination are included in this study, the entirety of their lived experiences and experiences of reporting discrimination cannot be fully captured in this study alone. Some people in the study chose only to summarize the harm inflicted upon them instead of going into full detail about each experience of discrimination, and others referred to multiple experiences and only gave examples of what they felt comfortable

sharing. Each co-creator is purposefully described in alphabetical order of their pseudonym so as not to prioritize one person over another, as each is a truly valuable contributor to knowledge creation, and their collective stories are incredibly significant to higher education. This chapter shares the background experiences with readers and briefly describe each person. The next chapter provides the findings, including concrete themes and examples from the co-creators that are more in-depth about their experiences.

I previously described my own experiences of reporting discrimination and how I was able and unable to exist authentically in the workplace in higher education due to my depression and frustration with my white cisgender supervisor. The descriptions I heard from co-creators were reflective of my own experiences of discrimination and gaslighting. The co-creators had similar experiences, and their stories reflected common themes of what was included in the literature review, such as being labeled as a complainer (Ahmed, 2021), concern for retaliation or negative consequences (Yu & Lee, 2020), and they already knew they were seen in a stereotypical light by cisgender people in the workplace (Rice et al., 2021; Rudin et al., 2014; Ruggs et al., 2015). While listening and engaging in conversation with the co-creators, I noticed a resonating rapport with them as a transgender staff of color in higher education, and I found myself wondering why these stories were not shared previously in research.

When it came to the specific co-creators of my study, as noted in Table 1, there were folks involved in my research who had a variety of experiences in the field of higher education. They represent various racial, ethnic, and gender identities, as well as functional areas with different institutional types. As a researcher, I prioritized the ability to have co-creators from multiple racial, workplace, and ethnic backgrounds to shed light on discrimination experienced by transgender staff of color in higher education.

The co-creators, April, CM, Corby, Fik, and JA, all willingly and trustfully brought their whole selves to the study. I was thrilled to have people who had worked in LGBTQ centers, counseling centers, an academic department, admissions, and academic success centers. Table 1 shows the people involved in the study were from different regions of the United States regions, including the Midwest, the Northeast, and the South. However, some co-creators shared they attended undergraduate or master's programs in the area of the Western United States. There were also people with different race, ethnicity, and gender identities, including people who were multiracial, Black, genderfluid, and transgender. The Black trans femme and transgender man in the study explicitly discussed discriminatory practices of anti-Blackness. Overall, the experiences of reporting discrimination the co-creators reported were astounding to me and, at times, left me without words. In the following sections, I share more about each person involved in the study and then describe themes from their shared stories.

April (she/her)

April was likely the co-creator who felt the most comfortable with vulnerability and discussing her experiences of reported discrimination. She currently identifies as a transgender woman who is multiracial, both Mexican and Filipina. She shared that her parents were from the Philippines and Oaxaca, Mexico. She described how when she reported discrimination at Atlantic State University, she identified as trans femme and genderfluid. April was conscious and shared about her speech impediment, which she came to describe as something that was weaponized against her and perpetuated her discrimination. She sat and fidgeted during the interview and quickly noted that once she felt comfortable talking about her experience, her fidgeting and speech impediment would lessen over time in our conversations. April had a different trajectory in becoming a higher education staff member than the other people involved

in the study. Surprisingly, she started her career in higher education in academic affairs and taught in gender and sexuality studies. Once she started teaching, she realized that she wanted to be in contact with students outside of the classroom and then found her way into student affairs.

At the beginning of her first interview, she noted:

I like to describe myself as a recovering academic. I got hired on the academic side of things. Teaching, teaching ethnic studies and LGBTQ students, with a specific emphasis on immigration and immigration policy, and building community. But I then ended up transitioning over to the student affairs or Student Life side of things, because you know, I would have all of these awesome conversations with my students. It would be great and then the class would be over, and then I would see no follow-up, no accountability, nothing to check in with students.

April was very charismatic, genuine, and direct about her experiences and what brought her to where she is now in the Midwest. While she noted the differentiation from the time of reporting discrimination to the present during the interview, she emphasized that someone assigned male at birth who expresses their gender in a feminine way makes cisgender people in the workplace in higher education uncomfortable. As a researcher, I wanted to be conscious of how co-creators describe themselves and also conscious of how trans misogyny occurs even outside of one's self-identification.

April came into the field of higher education as a staff member in student affairs because she wanted to engage with students in what she described as a three-pronged approach. She had been able to combine her creativity from a creative writing background, engage in students' narratives and lived experiences, and support students outside of the classroom. She said student affairs provided a "rare spot" where someone like herself can do what they are good at, what

they love, and what their passion is. She did not feel like other fields could provide that type of work environment, so she chose her path in student affairs. She had a fair amount of discrimination from one specific institution of Atlantic State University, specifically the Dean of Students who supervised her supervisor. She felt lucky to have supportive colleagues and a supervisor, although she noticed the limitations of her supervisor because she was at will. She came to work at Atlantic State University due to its location near a metropolitan city, the diversity of the student population, and the ability to create education and awareness about LGBTQ people at a college campus.

In her position at Atlantic State University, April witnessed multiple instances of racism, ableism, and transphobia. She experienced micro and macro aggressions from students, coworkers, and deans that oversaw her area. She reported discrimination multiple times to human resources because of what she saw happening to students as well as her own experiences of discrimination. The dean of students at the time of her reporting discriminated against her by approving her removal from a committee that she was nominated to be on because she made people uncomfortable. She had her responsibilities removed from presenting on behalf of the department she served in, and she repeatedly had instances of people policing her gender expression and cultural attire. Additionally, her speech impediment was referred to as an accent by the dean of students, which caused all of these instances to motivate her to report discrimination.

CM (she/her)

CM is a 35-year-old Black person who identified as African American, had family in Nigeria, and had done some research on their ancestors there. She worked at The Valley College in the Northeast of the United States as a Deputy Counselor and African Language Tutor, which

tends to be the workload of two jobs combined. She grew up in the western part of the United States and now lives near her grandmother's house by The Valley State College. She discovered more about herself when working at a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Nigeria, where some of her family lives. While in Nigeria, she connected and understood more about her relative's tribe. Through the stories and experiences with the tribe, she talked about coming to understand her own lived experiences being a Two-Spirit person. She describes her identity and coming into her own as:

I started to learn a lot of thoughts about being a two-spirit person. I learned that it was a part from being a gender identity alone, it's also a spiritual identity in my community, it's a spiritual thing, it's a sexual thing, and most importantly, a cultural thing. I think it's used within my community. It encompasses cultural, spiritual, and maybe gender identity as well...It's not just about gender identity. I think it's much more than that. It's one of those reasons why I feel special being a two-spirit person, knowing for a fact that I was much more than people thought I was, I think that's satisfying for me.

CM was unapologetically themselves, and she showed up as her whole self. While getting to know CM, she expressed herself outwardly in all ways. She did this through her jewelry, her clothing, her makeup, and the artwork on her wall. She was very proud of who she is in the best ways possible, which has also created tension for her at work.

CM's experience reporting discrimination based on gender identity stems from her finding herself when returning to work at The Valley State College after visiting family in Nigeria and coming to know herself better. She began to wear jewelry and clothing that matched her gender identity. Her narrative describes how she is the only Black person in her office of counselors and tutors and that the institution is a Predominantly White Institution. She's very

aware of her Blackness in white spaces and found there was an integration process for her to acclimate to the much more white environment than what she was used to when she first began working at The Valley State College. She specifically shared the Black population at her current employer, where she experienced discrimination, is about ten percent, and she had built a strong relationship with Black students. Her undergraduate institution was (and still is) a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), and she was raised in a predominantly Black and Brown community.

Regarding her experiences of discrimination as a transgender staff of color, CM describes her experiences as:

I think it's been a wonderful experience to be in The Valley State College. I really love this community. I saw this [referring to discrimination experiences], and my friends said I should quit. I said, 'I won't quit because we don't have enough Black folks here.' I think I can make people behave in a like manner, and it's been a wonderful experience for me. Much of her narrative described her sense of responsibility in showing up for her Black and trans community that she intended to stay at The Valley State College and not be pushed out for being who she is. She also discussed the questions from friends about why she stays there when they have experienced discrimination and had challenges with her department. She was very committed to the workplace, and sometimes, it does not seem her colleagues are as thoughtful about her experience as a two-spirit Black professional. In the next chapter, I share more about CM's experience as a transgender staff of color.

CM's experience of reporting and experiencing discrimination stemmed from her need to identify her sex on a grant form that she was required to fill out. She was on a team of other counselors where each person had to fill out a form and indicate their sex and what two-spirit was not an option; she added the term in herself. After turning in her form to the appropriate

administrator, who is a colleague of hers, she began to be treated differently by her coworkers. She had fewer students coming to see her during her meetings with students. Within a week of submitting the form, she was outed by a colleague who brought up the question asking what two-spirit is and shared that CM indicated it on her form in front of the entire staff. This instance dictated a series of events that led her to report discrimination.

Corby (she/her)

Corby is a gentle and kind soul, which I found incredibly profound while conversing with her. She shared she is a transgender woman and has immigrant Haitian parents, which is an integral part of her story of reporting discrimination. She described the necessity of her parents having a low-profile life and the constant fear of deportation. Corby is quieter at work due to her background and socialization but has worked through that, given some challenges with discrimination and the need to speak up about her experiences. She worked at Southern College for about seven years, located in the southern United States. Corby worked in admissions and secured a position after being recommended to work there by a friend. Southern College is the same undergraduate institution as well. She described her experiences of why she works there as:

It was merely because I had studied there. I had graduated from there. I felt like I was familiar with the environment. I'm the kind of person that I get attached to things. It really pushed me, and I felt like I wanted to continue to have a relationship with that institution. I know I've got other options, but I wasn't really interested.

Of the other co-creators, she was the only one who worked as an undergraduate student at the institution they attended. She shared that as a student, she rarely experienced discrimination, given that she is a Black transgender person. She felt the people who surrounded her in her community were encouraging and would be supportive, so she decided to get a job there. Corby

consistently describes the support that she feels for her community. While her parents have not always understood her experience of being transgender, they understood that she could face obstacles as a Black Haitian person in the United States.

As an admissions officer, she worked specifically with international students applying to the college. She noted admissions could be competitive for applicants since there are limited openings for international students. Corby's story of reporting discrimination began when she decided not to admit an international student because they were unqualified to meet admissions standards, and her supervisor was family friends with the applicant. Corby's supervisor urged her to admit the student into their system, and Corby refused. After her consistent refusal, the supervisor yelled at Corby and spoke poorly about her Haitian culture and background. Corby then decided because there were so many witnesses that she would report discrimination. Corby had challenges with her supervisor and some colleagues that perpetuated racist and transphobic stereotypes about her. Research (Smith & Fredricks-Lowman, 2020) shows that administrators in higher education can perpetuate white supremacy and be inadequate supervisors, which complements Corby's story.

Fik (she/they)

Fik had worked at G University for six years and was a psychologist/social worker who previously worked at a high school before working at a university. They were a clinical psychologist who supported students in the counseling center. She shared a passion for working with young adults and teenagers that she described as "...working with young minds, shaping the future, and...I always find it fascinating working with kids and with young adults and future talents." Fik had progressed in their career and found working in higher education to be a fitting next step after serving as a psychologist in a local high school. She found the counseling center

they worked in to have a positive perception of reputable and very qualified psychologists; therefore, she took on the opportunity to work with talented colleagues.

Fik described themselves as “mixed” because her father is Black and her mom is Hispanic. She talked about growing up in a mixed household, how it shaped who she is today, and how she viewed the world. She shared the complexity of her identity experience, which was a privilege to hear, listen to, and talk through the problematic nature of society toward people similar to herself. She shared:

Growing up in a mixed household, I would say it shaped the way I viewed the world. Being from a minority group, I always view myself as probably one of the most marginalized groups of people in the country because, first of all, I identify as a racial minority. I’m also transgender so those two together...When you just belong to one of those groups, it’s always a problem. Then when you have to identify and belong to both of those groups, that’s a double problem, as well, in the society that we live in nowadays. So yeah, I would say what makes me me is that I’m unapologetically me. I don’t care about what people think when I present myself as who I am. It’s always about what I think about myself. I’m always about what I believe is good for me and what I believe is me.

I appreciated the vulnerability, authenticity, and profound explicit self-love that came even through the camera while on Zoom with Fik. She was just herself and existing in the best way she knew without compromising who she was or what she knew she represented. As a researcher and transgender staff of color in higher education, I felt a rapport with her ability to be unapologetic, as she stated, because often, that may not be the case with people similar to herself.

In her story, she talked about how she experienced discrimination, not only in the staff position that she held but even in her childhood. She shares her experience of exclusion from peers in high school and considers that it might be because she is Black or because she did not fit a mold that others did. She said that once she began socializing more with people as an adult, she hoped society would grow with her as she did, coming to know herself and who she was. I appreciated this quote from her that summarizes her outlook and challenges along the way in her experience as a psychologist at a college campus: “I was viewed like once I start growing up and I start going into the society, I meet new people, and society will grow along with me. I’ve found out that to be wrong because it feels like I’m growing, but society is not growing.” Her statement resonated with me because, as research shows, there is an increasing amount of transgender people in the United States (Herman et al., 2022). However, there are historic amounts of anti-transgender laws that are perpetuating violence and dehumanizing rhetoric about transgender people (Trans Legislation Tracker, 2024). There are reports (Neus, 2023) that 53 transgender people were killed in the United States alone.

Fik’s story of reporting discrimination stemmed from returning to the office for work in person after COVID restrictions were lifted. She noticed that when people saw her in person, they treated her differently compared to when she worked with them remotely. Her colleagues and supervisor began to clock her, and they assumed she was transgender, which caused her to become more socially isolated from colleagues and professional development opportunities. She also had her amount of student appointments as a psychologist reduced because students did not feel comfortable meeting with her because they found out that she is transgender. After these multiple instances of discrimination and isolation in the workplace, Fik decided to report discrimination.

JA (he/him)

JA was a transgender Black man who described himself as personable, engaging, and caring. He was also the co-creator who shared the least compared to the other people in the study and needed to be more explicit about his experiences or background before coming into higher education as a field. When I asked him to describe himself to me during our first interview, he spoke about how he has experienced transphobia from others and that he is not taken seriously as a human and finds ways to cope. While he has experienced much transphobia in his life, he talked about how he loves working in higher education and the interactions he can have with people different than himself. He shared,

Working in higher education will make you, bring you closer to a kind of different set of people. And, you know, for the sake of humans, you share you love each other and I think that's how we are supposed to be. So, basically, for the sake of interaction getting to know people, a lot of people, different kinds of people.

JA described working in a predominantly white institution, Mountain College, a community college in the Midwest. He serves as an administrative coordinator and works among colleagues at the front desk of an academic department. He spoke about the tension he felt among colleagues who were white and that it was challenging as a Black transgender staff member because there would be disrespectful actions by white coworkers. JA's white cisgender colleagues would start arguments with him regularly and other Black staff members in the office for no reason. He felt that they were specifically targeting him because he is Black and transgender. The arguments and negative comments from colleagues became pervasive, which caused him to report discrimination. Additionally, the climate did not help that the institution had seventy percent white students, and he was one of the very few Black people in his office.

The co-creator's contribution to knowledge in this shared creation of a dissertation is unprecedented with their vulnerability, authenticity, and directness, given the sensitive nature of the topic of the study. The snapshot of each person involved in the study, as shown above, is a limited view of their full-lived experiences and does not capture them in their entirety. The following chapter will show the thematic findings and connection to Salas-SantaCruz's (2021) framework.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

After the Spring of 2021, when I had removed myself from a toxic workplace in higher education, I found myself in a state of anger and frustration, holding onto grudges from that difficult time in my life. As I brought myself into the dissertation and this study, I found myself in awe of the co-creators in the study. I could not imagine being in their shoes, facing the circumstances that they did, nor comprehend how people such as their perpetrators continue to work in higher education, many of whom have received promotions since. I was simultaneously humbled to continue to be aware of anti-Blackness, transmisogyny, and transmisogynoir against transgender Black women and femmes of color who are transgender. The insidious nature of oppression, which permeates systemic oppression and educational institutions, reared its ugly head in these co-creators' lives in a way that I could not fathom possible. In gathering their stories, I sought to pause, listen, and sit with the trauma, power, and grace each co-creator displayed.

This chapter presents the study's findings and includes specific emerging themes. The purpose of the constructivist qualitative study (Merriam, 2014) is to understand the lived experiences of transgender staff of color and their experiences reporting discrimination in higher education. I developed questions aimed at centering the experiences of transgender staff of color using a constructivist qualitative methodology and Salas-SantaCruz's (2021) framework of decoloniality for a trans* of color critique of educational criticism. As part of my methodology, I utilized member checking (Birt et al., 2016), which required each co-creator to review the transcripts of each interview to ensure their stories were accurately captured. Only one of the respondents communicated their concerns to their campus Title IX officers. The remaining co-creators reported their concerns of discrimination to their own supervisors or human resource administrators. I expand on this phenomenon in the discussion chapter of this dissertation. Overall, the findings of the study indicate compelling and revealing experiences of transgender staff of color who have reported discrimination in higher education.

Due to my own experiences, I found myself projecting my experiences of discrimination onto the co-creator's experiences when I reviewed the study's results. Some findings were

somewhat unexpected, and others affirmed my own experiences as a transgender person of color who has reported discrimination against a white cisgender queer woman. The thematic analysis (Adu, 2019) led me to generate codes while going through the transcriptions of interviews, which were then categorized into the development of the themes in this chapter. As discussed in the methodology chapter, I reviewed the data, extracted relevant information from the interviews based on the topic of the study, generated codes, categorized the codes, and then developed the themes presented in this chapter. Lastly, this chapter describes themes and patterns found in the co-creator's stories. along with the connection to Salas-SantaCruz's (2021) framework of decoloniality for a trans* of color critique of educational criticism.

Themes of the Stories

Findings are broken down by theme and each theme is presented below. Throughout this chapter, I denote where and how my findings answer the research questions guiding this study. While the emergent themes of the stories do not fully capture the entirety of the lived experiences of the co-creators, there are essential highlights and takeaways for educators, administrators, and society overall. As described in chapter three, I apply the conceptual framework of decoloniality for a trans* of color educational critique to the analysis and findings of the themes of the study. This analysis revealed five themes:

1. White Cissexist Capitalism and Normative Violence,
2. White Cissexist Imperialism in Higher Education,
3. Psychological Demotion and Policing of Transgender Bodies,
4. Inconsistent and Dismissive of the Harm of Transgender Staff of Color,
5. Institutional Negligence and Reconciliation of Emotions After Reporting.

To anchor the study's themes, it is essential to clarify and confirm that co-creators were questioned, dismissed, and belittled due to the colonial notions of sex-assigned-at-birth without any regard to a possibility or glimpse of their gender being outside of cisnormative narratives of reality (Driskill, 2016). The sections below answer to the research question of the lived experiences of trans staff of color who report discrimination.

As Salas-SantaCruz (2021) described in their conceptual framework of decoloniality for a trans* of color educational critique, the entire existence of a transgender person of color is multifaceted and holistic, unlike white transgender studies, which perpetuates a singular focus on the gender of an individual, rather than the holistic existence. Salas-SantaCruz (2021) states, "A trans* of color critique that begins and ends with trans people of color knowledge, theories, and experiences within and despite coloniality as foundational to trans-critique" (p. 1). The thematic ties to the framework are integrated into the findings described in each corresponding section of each theme and tie to Salas-SantaCruz's framework used in the study.

White Cissexist Capitalism and Normative Violence

The thematic section, White Cissexist Capitalism, and Socialized Violence, connects to Salas-SantaCruz's (2021) description of racial capitalism, the inhumanity that transgender people of color experience, and the erasure of their existence. The thematic findings in this section describe examples of how the co-creators experience violence daily, how they have been taught to normalize the violence they have experienced, have been taught to tolerate the cissexist colonial violence due to their Blackness, transness, and view as social deviants, both internal and external to higher education. Normative violence has informed how the co-creators are required to navigate when and how to speak, advocate, existing in the United States, and how they had come to understand how to live another day in a cissexist and violent society. Salas-Santa Cruz

(2021) describes how white trans studies exclude the experiences of transgender people of color in research and the violence often faced by transgender people of color. Salas-SantaCruz (2021) states,

The current hegemonic trans imaginary in education research consists of an ontological fragmentation that treats trans as ontologically different from other social categories. It leaves out sense of self among people of color, who do not rely on the gender/sexuality ontological distinction. (p. 6)

Salas-SantaCruz specifically sites Nicolazzo (2017) as an example, whereas in Nicolazzo's research,

...the concepts of race, gender, and sexuality are analyzed through an intersectional framework and show how other social identities exacerbate or mitigate the way trans students can potentially experience the cisnormative structures of schools and school practices. This form of educational criticism fails to critically analyze how power assemblages such as coloniality, racial capitalism, and imperialism shape knowledge production on trans identity, being/becoming, personhood, and the educational experiences of trans populations, particularly racialized people. (p. 5)

As described previously, this section of findings focuses on the lived experiences of the co-creators, which include their hyperawareness in a cissexist society, the barbarity of cisgender people, and the barbarity of society due to the white cissexist capitalistic culture against transgender people and the resulting themes. This theme includes subthemes that are described in detail, which include *hyperaware in a cissexist and racist society* and *the barbarity of cisgender people and society*. The co-creators in the study were hyperaware of their existence and what it meant to be in the United States, their socialization, and multiple identities. The outright barbaric actions

and perception that cisgender people and society as a whole have of transgender people of color was evident to the co-creators, who at times gave more grace than I thought possible of the ignorance and cissexism that they would not only experience but came to expect.

Hyperaware in a Cissexist and Racist Society

The co-creators in the study were hyperaware of their own identities and systemically oppressed identities and how oppression operates to create violence daily in their lives and, more specifically, in the workplace in higher education. Many co-creators discussed their inability to show up authentically. If they attempted to, they were hyperaware of their lack of safety and the racism that occurred by others in the workplace. Given the delicate balance of remaining true to themselves and being hyper-aware of the perception of the threat others perceived of their transness, Blackness, and experiences as people of color in higher education, each co-creator took different routes of navigating how they showed up as staff in the workplace. The following subsection describes the self-awareness and the climate for transgender people of color in higher education.

Climate and Hyperawareness of Transgender People of Color. Many of the co-creators were aware of what it meant to navigate the world as femmes, genderfluid, multiracial, Black, and Latinx transgender people and what it means for them to forcibly exist in a cisnormative, white supremacist institution such as higher education. For many of the stories, the start of the interview—when I asked them to please share about themselves and their identities—started similar to Fik’s description of herself and the story below. She described the hyperawareness of their oppression and positionality in society. Fik shared:

Being from a minority group, I always view myself as probably one of the most marginalized group of people in the country because, first of all, I identify as a racial

minority. I'm also transgender, so those two together...when you just belong to one of those groups, it's always a problem. Then, when you have to identify and belong to both of those groups, that's a double problem, as well, in the society that we live in nowadays...I didn't choose my racial background myself, I didn't choose my gender background myself, as well....Whether people like it or not, it's for them to figure out on their part.

Fik's experience of hyperawareness of their own lived experience of being a Black, Latinx, trans femme forced her to become more confident. As shown in the quote above, she is hyper-aware of her positionality as it pertains to her Blackness, transness, and arguably, the otherness she experiences. She knows her identity can lead her to be put in unsafe circumstances with other people because of society's inhumane and violent perceptions of transgender feminine people. She also notes that people who may view her negatively or in a judgmental manner are responsible for their perceptions and feelings.

CM began her story with an example of the socialization of young children in the United States and how that socialization can immediately shape or influence children's perceptions of who is valuable and valid, such as the perceived beauty of Black people. She described a story about her cousin using an anecdotal experience to explain the ignorance of race, the importance of discussing race in education, and the lack of racial awareness of adults. She talked about how race and the influence of racial stereotyping is an embedded concept in children at such a young age. CM shared,

It's something that should be instilled and inculcated into our curriculums right from the elementary schools. My cousin- It happened about three months ago, I was at my cousin's school to pick her up. I saw her; she was playing with two girls; one was white,

and one was Black. I asked her if she would like to take the two home, you know what her response was? She told me she would take the prettier one home. I asked her what the prettier one was, and she pointed at the white one. I asked her what was wrong with the Black girl, she said, 'It's not pretty'I was thinking about I never really expected a young kid like that to understand the concept of race, but it's not about race; it's what she believes because she's just one of the two Black kids in her class.

While I listened to her, CM was comfortable enough to share and disclose about experiences of antiblackness, which, while not described this way by her directly, is an essential consideration for the study and validity of her own experience. Ross and Givens (2023) describe antiblackness as its inextricable link to Afropessimism (Wilderson, 2020). Rather than being viewed as people, Black people are viewed as “sentient beings” concerning slavery, which is permanent in current society and cannot be undone.

The racist, antiblack, violent system of slavery is irrevocably tied to being Black, according to Afropessimists, which perpetuates the white supremacist and colonial notions of gender, leading to violence against transgender people of color. CM directly named her lived experience as a Black trans feminine person because of the added labor that is to describe their experience of discrimination and the socialization that Black children are told by society. The vulnerability and descriptions of antiblackness and sharing with me as a non-Black researcher speaks volumes to the impact society has on her and other Black transgender people. I was aware of my position of privilege in which antiblackness does not similarly affect me. As evident by the quote above, CM's young cousin has already been influenced by white cissexist capitalism, which positions white cisgender bodies above Black transgender bodies. This is another example

of the need for hyperawareness of the co-creators and the violent socialization that children experience to only perpetuate negative narratives about transgender people.

For example, due to the antiblack and racist history of the United States, while there have been hundreds of years since chattel slavery, Black people are still seen as objects. They are exploited through labor and dehumanization due to their blackness. Therefore, their Blackness and experience of oppression because of chattel slavery are intertwined indefinitely. Similarly, before Corby shared her experience reporting discrimination in higher education as a transgender staff of color, she spoke about the daily micro (and macro) aggressions she experienced. Corby shared as a transgender person, experiencing microaggressions was a usual way of life. She had to pick and choose her battles regarding what she would address or not address, including in the workplace. Corby described how she experienced slights outside of work and in everyday life. She shared,

I'd just like to take the major one, the one that really stood out for me because, as a trans person, you tend to ignore some form of discrimination because it's more or less like a daily routine for us having to experience that. It could be facial expressions at times. It could [be a] word of mouth. You just tend to ignore because you can't really be giving attention to everybody, and throwing tantrums here and there does not really help. It's just best to ignore, but this particular one stood out.

The previous quote from Corby stood out because it made me reflect on my experience. I recognized from her story that violent, discriminatory actions become a part of the daily routine regardless of severity. As a transgender person, one is expected to manage one's own emotions, responses, and actions in order not to harm the feelings of cisgender people, which only perpetuates white cissexist capitalism.

When listening to the co-creators describe their psychological impact experienced by a white cissexist capitalistic and violent society, Fik's story reflects shared experiences on how they view the need for a strong work ethic not to be questioned about their competency in the workplace. This finding is especially true for a transgender staff member of color in higher education. Fik described their work ethic:

Now, I just go as myself, and I hope for the best. Another way that I deal with it in the workplace is probably just trying as much as possible to prove my value, to prove that I can and I am competent enough to do the job regardless of my gender or regardless of where I am. Most times, I have found out that, especially during my first job as a high school social worker, I found that if I'm able to do the job at a very high standard, at a much higher standard than maybe my peers at work or my colleagues, I found out that maybe I might escape some discrimination. I try as much as possible to do my job to a very high standard to make sure that I'm invaluable. I'm very valuable to the workplace. The sentiment that one needs to work hard to overcompensate for other people's perception of their work ethic and ascribed stereotypes. Unfortunately, Fik felt the need to be better than their peers because of their expected workplace discrimination experiences. She knows the challenges of being a Black transfeminine person in higher education. However, she described being expected to curb the possibility of being discriminated against as invaluable to an institution. The next subsection describes the barbaric response to transgender people that cisgender people had to the co-creators in higher education.

The Barbarity of Cisgender People and Society

I call this subsection The Barbarity of Cisgender People in a White Cissexist Capitalist Society because of the inhumane and appalling disregard for transgender staff by cisgender

people. Some co-creators discussed the practical empathy they had for cisgender people and their approach to addressing harm they had experienced from cisgender people, such as violent and dehumanizing rhetoric about their identities and sympathizing with the people who harmed them. While listening to their stories, I did my best not to project my feelings of anger and frustration at what they experienced because of the ignorance and flat-out violence of others in higher education. Fik talked about how cisgender people do not know any better, and therefore, they do not fault them for their ignorance. Fik spoke about how she recognized that society has not caught up to what it needs to know to be able to support transgender people in everyday life. She shared a statement that resounded with me:

Just from my experience, I found that when I feel like I'm doing well to adjust to the society, to adjust to people's feelings, to adjust to people's orientation about trans population and how people view us, I feel to society is not doing the same. When I go out and see people giving the impression that society is trying its best to change or to advance or to better understand trans people; when I see people giving this impression, I feel like they don't know what they're talking about...not much has changed since I was a little kid until now. I feel like me personally, I've just found a way to live with it, to grow with it like that without society doing as much.

I found the humility and empathy for cisgender people's lack of awareness and genuine ignorance to be astounding. I could not imagine myself providing such empathy and a sense of authentic forgiveness for cisgender people, especially if they are the ones who are causing the most harm to my livelihood. Fik's comments demonstrate the experiences multiple co-creators have had in their lived experiences and in reporting discrimination in higher education. As a researcher and person who has experienced discrimination in higher education as a staff

employee and continues to do so as a transgender person of color in higher education, Fik's description of society not growing along with her resonated with me.

An example of the barbarity of cisgender people was Corby's experience with her supervisor yelling at her in front of coworkers because she would not comply with her demands to admit a student. Corby confronted her supervisor, Kelly, and she told her she would not admit the student because they did not meet the qualifications of the college. Kelly became irate in front of other staff members in the admissions office. Kelly had used Corby's identity to verbally criticize, argue with her, and scold her for not following her directives. Corby described how the situation felt and how the discriminatory action took place. Corby shared:

I suffer from anxiety, especially when someone raises their voice at me. This particular day, I was just back from my lunch break, and I was at my desk trying to sort out files And all that, and she bared in that particular day. It wasn't really a matter of being shouted at or reprimanded. It was the words that was used. In her words, and I quote, she Said, 'You're a nobody. When I tell you to do something, you do it. You're just someone Who came from a country whereby the population of animals is more than the humans there. You're so-' I don't even know the right words to use, but it was really crazy. People tried to get her to calm down. It was really weird because the whole situation didn't require that kind of reaction at all. You could have easily just shout at me or reprimand me and get me to do what you wanted to do. You could even do it in a polite manner, but she said those words that day.

As Corby described her experience, I heard desperation in her voice. Due to the fluctuation in her voice, she sounded like what she had experienced was a traumatic event she was still processing. Revisiting the conversation and situation was a vulnerable circumstance to talk about. I

appreciated that Corby would share this with me and trust my ability to honor her story. I could not capture the feelings from Corby's voice and what she elicited while telling me what had happened to her.

The lack of support that April received exhibited what I define as a barbaric response from Title IX officials on her campus. Whenever April met with an investigator, they scheduled her meeting in public and would be annoyed with her. She shared, "I would do a walk and talk with them as they headed off to another meeting that was more important than me actually coming in and wanting to do a report. It was very much like, 'Oh, you're back again.'" In the eyes of the Title IX investigators, there was no offering of active listening, a private space, or regard for the sensitive nature of her reports of discrimination. As she shared, they were aware that her concerns were unimportant and did not care to create space for her.

As Minkin and Brown (2021) described, while there has been an increase in people knowing transgender people in their lives in the United States, many still believe in the colonial constructs that the determinant of one's gender is one's assigned sex at birth. The untruths about assigned sex at birth equating to one's gender identity can contribute to the spread of misinformation and hostility. Like Fik, each person in the study shared a resounding voice of being aware of ignorance and the lack of awareness in society about transgender people and the stereotyping they experience.

White Cissexist Imperialism in Higher Education

Multiple co-creators had experiences of being hidden from the plain view of students, faculty, and staff at their campuses, which impeded their ability to fulfill their job responsibilities. Salas-SantaCruz's (2021) framework discusses how imperialism shapes who can create and is seen as the knowledge producer in educational research, in which imperialism

purposefully excludes transgender people of color in educational research. The use of control of imperialism is shown in the glaring examples of the control of transgender Black and brown bodies of the co-creators in this dissertation study. Their experiences discussed in this thematic finding exemplify white cissexist imperialism to control if, how, and when Black and brown transgender staff of color can exist in higher education. For example, Fik began her position as a psychologist at the counseling center on campus at G University, where she started during the shutdown of COVID-19 in 2020.

Fik thoroughly enjoyed her job supporting students going through some of the most challenging times of their lives at the height of the pandemic. During the first two years of her career, the university allowed her to work remotely and meet students on Zoom. The ability to meet with students and colleagues on Zoom provided a comfortable space for Fik to exist in her gender and express her gender in a most affirming way. I found the concept of living one's truth via Zoom in the workplace and being affirmed compared to working in person. In the conclusion chapter, I share more considerations and takeaways from this phenomenon of not being clocked or found out about being trans due to the ability to work remotely.

Fik became conscious of the policing of their own body as a transgender and Black person once she was in the public eye among the cisgender gaze (Cotten, 2020). The cisgender gaze is the perception of a cisgender that is projected person onto a transgender or the act of assumedly clocking a transgender person and the objectification, dehumanization, and assumed deviancy of a trans person's existence in their own body. Additionally, the cisgender gaze perpetuates the colonial notions of gender, equating to a binary form. Serano (2007) describes the cisgender gaze as the perspective of cisgender people who perceive and interpret transgender people due to stereotypes and prejudice informed by society. The ability to work remotely and

via Zoom allowed Fik to be stealth if she so chose to and not be under an eye of surveillance. The term stealth is described in more detail in the literature review chapter. However, once Fik had to return to work in person, the perception and interaction of others at her university changed. I use the term “hiding” in this section because Fik—among other co-creators—was being hidden from students, faculty, and staff with whom they regularly worked.

Fik described her experience of being hidden and isolated after beginning to work in person at her university:

So, I don't really have much experience about how accommodating the work setting will be or how people will view me when I go into work because I had to work from home over half the time when I started working. So it came as a little bit of a shock to me when I resumed full-time at work. When I started interacting with coworkers with supervisors, it came as just a little bit of a shock because the way when you are interacting with people online. I know it's really hard to tell about the character their views, but when You start interacting with people, face-to-face, every day. When you start seeing them, Start relating, start talking, you know where they start about issues and everything. So, I would say it was a little bit of a shocking experience to me because I thought, in that kind of setting, in that kind of work setting, where they have people from various type of background, they have people from various educational backgrounds, I felt people would be much more educated and have much more orientation about gender and how people feel themselves. I felt it should be a much more conducive environment for me to work but I found that it wasn't really that. So that, for me, was a bit of a disappointment...

When patients come in, or when potential patients come in, you are assigned the patients. So, what I noticed was when I started getting patients, in person, patients started coming

in; after maybe two or three sessions, I noticed maybe some of the patients were not entirely comfortable with me. Maybe, for whatever reason, they Chose not to continue or switch to others, the psychologists. But I expected from supervisors, from the boss, and everything was support. No. But I didn't get that support. I found that whatever, whenever, maybe any patient decides that they don't want to continue working with me, the bosses were happy to just switch to another psychologist. So, I started getting less and less work, which I didn't like. Professional development opportunities and socializing with others in the workplace. Literally not invited and excluded. Yeah, another example is maybe those days, seminar or workshop organized for psychologists, where bosses of supervisors had to nominate two or three of us to go, or to learn more to advance your career, learn new things...I noticed that I really got no involvement in those sorts of workshops and seminars. Most times, I was excluded from some of these things. No, I felt I should have equal opportunity to learn and advance my knowledge about the field as my coworkers and colleagues, and I felt I wasn't getting that no. And also, maybe social events and social gatherings, amongst staff, and maybe dinner, maybe formal events like dinner amongst staff, that I might not get an invite to. Maybe because the person giving out invites has something against me due to my color or due to my gender identity, I might not even get an invite no.

While Fik was able to hide her gender or not be found out as being transgender due to working remotely from home, when she began working in person, it began to affect her ability to work and retain clients she served at the university. She was also excluded from social outings and conference opportunities for her professional development and isolated from coworkers because of her transness. The administrative staff who assigned clients to each psychologist purposefully

controlled the students who had been assigned Fik as a counselor at the college. Upon returning to the university in person and being clocked by cisgender staff, she stopped receiving assignments from student clients as a psychologist. Her Black trans feminine body was being hidden out of sight from coworkers when the option presented itself to exclude her socially and professionally. Her supervisor determined she should not attend professional conferences with her colleagues or represent the university at professional conferences, which has inhibited her ability to grow professionally and obtain more professional growth in the same manner as her colleagues above description of discrimination that Fik faced illustrates the white cissexist imperialistic control over her Black transgender body and exhibits the capitalistic imperialism that the university did not want to be seen as associated with a Black transgender femme professional staff member. The findings similar to Fik's collected from other co-creators conclude a commonality of their identities delegitimized; they were invisible and were shown and treated with a lack of humanity by their superiors.

In the same interview with Fik, she described the importance of providing an excellent first impression, focusing on her qualifications for a position, and not leaving anyone in an interview to be able to question her abilities due to her gender identity. She shared,

If it's possible for me to hide it at first, to hide my gender at first, or maybe not reveal too much about my gender, I do that. That's the way I used to do. I used to do that a lot when I was younger. It works sometimes, but most times it doesn't. We just have a way of figuring out if you're trans or if you're cis. It doesn't always work. I've learned from that.

I found Fik's description of needing to hide their gender from future colleagues and supervisors and her attempt at being discreet in the workplace to be disheartening. Fik seemed to

describe hiding her gender—although unwillingly but consciously—in an effort not to reveal too much about herself because she did not want to risk losing out on a potential job. She had to relegate her appearance, what she revealed in interviews about herself, and her gender expression, which led to imperializing herself based on the white cissexist standards of higher education staff and what would or would not be deemed as palatable when serving students. She knew if she were to have revealed too much about her identity, she risked negative recourse from potential employers and universities. She had to consciously choose how and when to disclose or choose not to reveal her gender identity, both voluntarily or accidentally involuntarily. The forthcoming section provides more examples of similar circumstances that were faced by co-creators.

Since being transgender can be perceived as a detriment to potential employers or other people in the workplace, which could, therefore, affect the organization's bottom line, research (Reed et al., 2015) shows there is a need for transgender employees to be hyper-conscious of their own gender and gender expression. As Fik described, she used to practice hiding her gender as much as possible for first impressions with potential employers. She had ultimately decided to give up because, one way or another, cisgender people would still find a way to *clock* her. As described in the forthcoming section on the significance of palatability in the hegemonic culture, multiple co-creators had experienced the act of being *clocked* (Schiffer, 2022) by cisgender people or were found out to have been transgender by colleagues, students, or other staff in higher education. As described in the literature review, the term *clock* applies to April, another co-creator's experience in higher education. To clock someone is also based on the assumption that transness can be assumed, and trans (or cis people) can be detected. The definition of clocked or being clocked is described in the literature review chapter of this dissertation.

Specifically, the trans feminine co-creators being clocked was a part of the discrimination they experienced.

April, a multiracial femme, genderfluid, assigned-male co-creator, experienced similar types of discrimination to Fik. The administration forced her to be physically invisibilized and hidden away from faculty, staff, and students. However, her role as the queer and transgender advocate called for her to give educational presentations for the university community and create awareness of LGBTQ people for the entire university. Atlantic State University had community interviews and presentations for the finalist candidates for the Assistant Vice President and Dean of Students. April did not think too seriously about the importance of this role concerning her position because she was at least two levels organizationally below the Dean of Students and did not consider attending the finalist interviews. However, over time, April came to understand how much of a vested interest the Dean of Students took in her role, her competency as an employee, and the very public statements the dean made about her and others. The dean's comments about April's performance in her professional role and concern about her being public facing in her position were a result of the imperialist perpetuation of racist, ableist, and transphobic ideology. Ultimately, the dean of students removed April from committees and limited her ability to conduct the basic functions of her job. Like many of the professionals co-creators described in their experiences, this dean is still working in the field of student affairs at a similar institution to Atlantic State University.

Another experience of April having her trans feminine, multiracial, genderfluid body being imperialized and controlled was from other colleagues on campus. As discussed previously, she was removed from a committee that aligned with her position description simply because she was transgender. April was also surveilled when doing basic tasks in her role, such

as tabling at outreach events to inform students, staff, and faculty about the resources of the Multicultural Center and her role as the Transgender and Queer Educator. She described one experience where she was tabling at an outreach event and was dismissed as a professional staff member. She shared,

[Another director] sat in on a few of our workshops and trainings, and he [Dean of Students] said that you know, she didn't feel that we [April and coworkers] were very receptive to our majority of students. He was identifying the things that could potentially make them feel uncomfortable. So, seeing a trans woman of color who is a little bit radical learning, he felt that that would have been too far for students. He wanted to have the safer approach and essentially not have me be present. Not have me be at events. He asked me specifically not to be at the open house not to be at specific events. To which I was like, 'Alright, fine. Then I'll be behind the scenes and do programs and plan all the programs, do the budgeting and everything' to which another Associate Vice Chancellor ran into me while I was doing a tabling or table work for a fundraiser at the university coffee shop, and asked me, 'Oh, so what do you do?' and I mentioned my role, and he was like, 'Oh, so you're just a party planner.' I was like, oh, so I can't do my job because I'm unsafe for everyone, but when I do my job, it's not even being acknowledged by the university. So, putting on the trans monologues is just a party, and putting on the queer-inclusive swim is just a party. But because they don't see me on campus because I've been asked not to be there. I'm just a party planner.

Yet again, I was speechless; I could not imagine what April had gone through. Being told she was making people uncomfortable simply while conducting her essential position duties and the perception from others on campus of her being invisible to the point at which people did not

know who she was in her professional role was shocking. The comments she received made it evident she needed to be taken more seriously to conduct the work within her role. The experiences of the co-creators in the study made me consider how they became objects or representatives of diversity and inclusion without any additional substance or value as employees.

As Patton et al. (2019) noted, institutions rarely utilize research to create change in diversity, equity, and inclusion within their organizations. Co-creators were consistently objectified; not treated as people valued within the organization and less than others. Fik, for example, could not participate in professional development opportunities. They explicitly described how they were prohibited from attending conferences or engaging in social activities with their co-workers and were excluded from after-hours happy hours and outside-of-work social opportunities. They were the only person excluded from such social invitations.

Psychological Demotion and Policing of Transgender Bodies

The co-creators in the study experienced what I term *psychological demotion and policing of transgender bodies*. The title of psychological demotion and policing of transgender bodies stems from the policing of bodies of the co-creators who cannot exist and show up to work without needing to be concerned about people's comments on their appearance or gender expression. In one instance, April was told "in the best interest of her safety," she should come to work looking more femme and palatable to other people so that people are not uncomfortable. Therefore, psychological demotion and policing of transgender bodies, transgender staff of color in higher education are controlled by cisgender people, and the co-creators' experiences of discrimination show how they were treated not for the best interest of themselves, but for the best interest of all others.

Salas-SantaCruz (2021) describes, the hegemonic culture is the dominant narrative of educational research and excludes the existence of transgender people of color. When the co-creators experienced discriminatory acts, the essence of their humanity was often questioned, erased, and invalidated. The psychological and verbal violence co-creators experienced included complete hostility toward their holistic being, which went beyond solely their gender, race, or ethnicity. For example, when April received feedback from her dean of students at her college, he described how her accent and appearance were off-putting to people on a committee on which she served and she should not give public presentations to the campus community because others may feel uncomfortable with her presence. April did not have an accent. In one instance, April was told by the dean of students she should no longer be doing educational presentations and training in her role as the Transgender and Queer Educator. She described what the experience was like being a multiracial Filipina and Mexican trans femme and the discrimination she faced at Atlantic State University. She shared the feedback she received from the Dean of Students and administrators:

I was leading a Safe Zone Training. They asked for, even though they said that they didn't want undergraduates to be doing the training anymore because of putting undergraduates in a potentially traumatic space, and also, they wanted to have someone who was vetted by having great work, the counseling work to start doing these trainings. I was pulled off of several of them, because if they said that students may have difficulty understanding my accent. I was just like, I don't have an accent. And then, I was told, 'Well, it's difficult to understand you sometimes.' I was like I have a slight speech impediment. I talk quickly, but it's not an accent. Are you just saying that you want one of our queer white students or staff? Sarah (pseudonym of coworker) is the only white

person on staff and is a program coordinator. The administration already has issues with someone who's a program coordinator giving a presentation; they only wanted a higher-level admin to be doing it. So, it was either do I face a macro aggression because of you know, my perceived inability to command English even though my master's degree is in English? Yeah. Or is it that my qualifications are up for debate? Because of my transness or because of my gender identity?

My jaw dropped when April shared this experience. I did my best not to make her feel worse about what happened, but I could not help myself from thinking, "What the fuck?" While listening to April, I was more upset listening to her share what happened because of the marginalized identities the Dean of Students had himself: a Black cisgender, a straight man whom April hoped would be more conscious of oppressed identities and diversity and equity work due to his positionality in higher education. April was quite literally removed from the visibility of others due to her inability to be seen as palatable in combination with the projection onto her from superiors of racism, ableism, and trans misogyny despite the fact her job description included public speaking and presenting to those in the university community. Still, her Filipina and Mexican identity were conflated to assume her speech impediment was interpreted as an accent and that her lack of ability to pass as a cisgender woman was so abhorrent that she should not be in public.

Hostility Towards a Holistic Existence

I call this section hostility towards a holistic existence because of the framework of Salas-SantaCruz (2021) I use for this study. Salas-SantaCruz (2021) states as researchers and educators' critique white trans studies, "...we need to move from research that asks what gender is and does to account for what the coloniality of gender is and what it is doing now. How are

trans* BIPOC people in education responding to the pedagogies the colonality of transgender (p. 11)?” They argue there is a need for research on how trans-normativity plays out in educational institutions, such as the lived experiences of practitioners, to understand the colonality of gender. Therefore, given the hyper-focus of gender with white trans studies, this section of findings discusses the hostility experienced by co-creators on their holistic existence, which encompasses their Blackness, brownness, multiracial, immigrant background, and disabilities.

April began her story by describing the transmisogyny she had experienced before starting her position at Atlantic State University, where she had reported discrimination. She began her story by describing her existence as an assigned male transgender person and how others would *clock* her in the workplace in higher education. In the years she worked at Atlantic State University, she identified as genderfluid. She spoke about her progression of needing to be conscious of her gender expression:

Just having people around who just know that like, you know, there might be a day where I come in like presenting very femme but if I was in a hurry and I may not have you know, I may not have done like full makeup because I might be clocked for having that facial hair undergrowth...it would have been something I would have been clocked out immediately. Like, ‘you need to pay attention to this if you’re gonna present’ and I thought, ‘But that’s my gender identity—why are you policing how I look when there’s clear guidelines and rules about how you can’t be policed for how you dress or how you or how you have your hair?’ If you’re going to be present...But others feel that because I’m trans, or that that’s okay because it’s in the ‘best interest of my safety.’

April had colleagues tell her how she should look in the workplace as if they knew what was in the best interest of her safety as a transgender feminine genderfluid person who was oftentimes

cisgender persons. As April shared, I could not (and still cannot) wrap my mind around how those interactions must have felt to have her body policed, her gender expression questioned, and how she continued to show up and function in the workplace. I found this to be very disturbing, trans misogynistic, and creating a hostile workplace.

April described her experience at Atlantic State University and how her position's responsibilities and work tasks became a nuisance to others; just her existence at the University caused discomfort. Specifically, the discomfort expressed by cisgender people impacted her professional development. April shared an example: she was removed from a committee to which she was nominated to serve by her supervisor called the Black, Indigenous, and Other People of Color Women's Coalition. The committee included stakeholders from across the institution, including faculty, staff, and students, to promote research opportunities and programs related to the success of women of color. April initially described feeling very excited about the opportunity because she was passionate about the topic and being a woman of color. She was removed quickly before she even began her tenure on the committee, which she felt was a tremendous professional development opportunity. April's supervisor received a directive from another department director, and the director, Michelle, told April she could no longer serve on the committee. April said,

And again, I love Michelle- Dr. Williams for nominating me for recognizing that this [was] something that I was very excited about. I was taken off that committee, but it was recommended by the director of the Multicultural Center to take me off that committee because I would make everyone feel uncomfortable. After all, I'm a trans person on that committee, and I'm not woman enough to be on the committee. Even though there are [were] just cisgender men on that committee as well. So that was a very specific example

of discrimination based specifically on my gender identity, but also where I went out, I was just like, what, what about me being trans is making people uncomfortable, and then I mentioned all the cisgender men or those who identify as male, are on the committee...And they just followed it up with 'oh, well, you know, you just started here', but I was like, what you just said before? It's because my trans identity would make people uncomfortable. Now you're saying it's because I'm new, which is it? They changed the subject.

April could not actively engage in the committee before being removed due to another director's complaint. Upon hearing this circumstance, I was perplexed as to why her supervisor complied. April also shared that while she understood her director had a spotlight on her from senior-level administrators and that she was an at-will employee. I was speechless after hearing April talk about her experience of being removed from a committee. I did not know how to respond, so I just listened to her give example after example of what happened to her. I was taken aback and consciously reminded of my trans masculine privilege and how transgender women are objectified and exploited by higher education institutions (Jones, 2020). Regardless of her supervisor's position status, I found it challenging to accept that her director would follow the instructions and deny April a professional development opportunity for which she had specifically been recommended.

One experience that stood out to me, which exemplified other experiences of the transgender staff of color I interviewed, was Corby's experience of discrimination. She spoke about how when she was growing up, she was very aware of the immigration status of her parents being undocumented Haitian immigrants. She said kids made fun of her and joked about deporting her if she got into trouble at school. Her mother raised her not to create conflict or get

into trouble due to not wanting her to bring attention to herself. She wanted her just to put her head down and concentrate on doing well in the workplace. Corby said her thoughts regarding blending in came from her mom not wanting to draw attention to her family's immigration status due to the risk of being deported.

Corby spoke about ensuring her mother she would never get into trouble and never start trouble. Corby was told she held responsibility for protecting the family's reputation as an immigrant and that she should be grateful for the opportunities she received in the United States. Corby shared, "...being appreciative of the opportunity life has given me by being Black in our country of origin, being here, and having access to opportunities like that. I did not want to take that for granted." Due to her family's background, Corby found bringing her fully authentic self to her role as an admissions counselor and officer came at a cost as a Black trans feminine person. This experience was described as a core memory for Corby.

Corby shared her experiences in a hostile work environment due to tension with her supervisor, even before the forthcoming discrimination case. As she shared her story about the discrimination she experienced from her supervisor, I was deeply moved by how destructive the situation must have felt. I could not imagine what I would do in that position. The experience of discrimination began when Corby found out her supervisor was a family friend of an international student applicant at Southern College. Corby's supervisor, Kelly, told Corby to automatically admit the student as soon as their application was received in the system, even though the student did not qualify for admission. As an international admissions officer, Corby did not feel it was an ethical position for her supervisor to put her in. Corby thought the supervisor, Kelly, should have upheld the university's admissions standards, regardless of her relationship with the applicant's family.

Throughout the interview, there were moments when Corby needed to pause and take a breath to calm herself and articulate what had occurred clearly. Corby also had moments when she was utterly silent while processing what she wanted to say. During these moments, I provided her space to think and process. The moments of silence during her interview said more than the story itself because the type of behavior exhibited by her supervisor, Kelly, is damaging and could result in long-term harm for a transgender person of color like Corby. As Salas-SantaCruz (2021) describes in the decoloniality for a trans* of color educational critique, there is a lack of humanity, awareness, and realization that transgender staff of color does not ascribe to colonial ways of knowing. They are not seen as valid in their multiple identities. The co-creators in this study were not being discriminated against solely on their gender identity; they were objectified, exploited, and used for the control of the supervisor, such as Kelly.

CM had experienced a breakthrough in their identity as a Black and African two-spirit person, as described in chapter four. She did not disclose her identity to coworkers or colleagues at The Valley State College. Still, she began transitioning socially in her attire with more jewelry and different aesthetics. She created art pieces in her office representing her two-spirit and African identity. Her story of reporting discrimination began as she described the unfortunate circumstance of being outed by colleagues in her department. In essence, Corby was forced to be outed to her colleagues in her department as a student success counselor and tutor. Her department had everyone fill out paperwork for a grant form to receive additional funding for the department, and the form required demographic information to be collected for those involved in the grant application, which included gender options of both “male and female,” neither of which she felt comfortable selecting. She shared,

I couldn't have lied because I wanted to stand up for myself. I just indicated on the form that I was neither and that I was two-spirit. Then I left the form on my table, went to see someone outside, and before I got back, and one of the staff saw it [the form] and felt like they never really knew the kind of person I was. They felt like maybe I was confused. He was perplexed as well. I think he went on to tell other people what he saw on my form, and that was what really happened...I started noticing because about four days later, we held a staff meeting, and I saw the way people were looking has changed...They were like, maybe a lot of people don't understand what it means to be a two-spirit person. They presume it's just an actual personality disorder, and it's the worst notion anyone could have had of me. I was feeling alienated. I was feeling segregated. I thought it was a minor issue until it started affecting my efficiency and effectiveness at work.

When CM described her experience of discrimination to me, along with her feelings of being isolated and alienated, it brought up feelings of my alienation during my reporting process of discrimination. Although I was taken aback to hear CM talk about how her coworkers began to think she had a personality disorder when they found out she was Two-Spirit, her story only confirmed what is described in the literature review on how cisgender people make assumptions about transgender people in the workplace (and applicants who are transgender) having a mental illness (Reed et al., 2015). CM shared another time she was forced to come out on campus. After that, students no longer visited her for counseling meetings. One student told her they had heard rumors about her identity, so students no longer felt comfortable meeting with her as their counselor. I could not imagine how it felt to hear students no longer feel comfortable with a person as a professional simply because of that professional's gender identity.

In looking back at my career, I do not know how I would navigate my gender identity disclosure if I had worked in a different functional area in higher education. Because I have overseen multiple LGBTQ centers and worked in identity-based centers in which I am very blatantly out as a queer and transgender person. Conversely, the impact of the student's behavior and assumptions about CM's ability to do her position was the tipping point for reporting discrimination to human resources, described later in this chapter.

JA's experiences of discrimination were not as outward or blatant as those described by other co-creators, although still alarming. JA said he was one of the very few Black trans people at the college at which he was employed and further described how he had built a coalition of Black trans and cisgender folks in whom he would confide about his experiences of discrimination. He shared there were other transgender staff at the college, but they were white people. While these white colleagues held similar identities of being trans, their whiteness caused them to be treated in a manner more privileged than JA was treated. He talked about how being transgender and Black in his office led to white people creating conflict for no apparent reason. He shared,

...You know most of the time...they don't really need a reason to start up some fights or arguments or stuff like that. So, they just do it straight up. So, but always, always the case is between the white and Black. Let me just put so so, which is so unfair to us, because they, we are always outnumbered and like the number is far, far greater than us.

JA described Mountain College's demographics as a predominantly white institution with at least 70% white enrollment population of students and an even more significant number of white people who served as staff members. When he discussed trying to befriend the white trans people on staff, he shared that they would give excuses not to spend time together outside of work or

would be consistently busy and not put forth effort into wanting to build a relationship with him or other Black trans staff.

Unfortunately, the conflicts with white staff in the office became more consistent, creating tension among the Black staff, including JA. As a result, JA reported the behavior to the department chair and some other colleagues as a coalition. Although JA was hopeful about potential remedies to the challenges he and others experienced by colleagues, he was somewhat pessimistic about the treatment he and other Black trans people were experiencing. He shared,

I'm still hoping maybe in the near future, something can, you know, change, and I look forward to that, because that will feel very, very great. Because it will feel like I said earlier, I'm the kind of person who loves interacting with different people. So if they can you know, treat us, us as normal people, it will be a very, very rare thing to you know, get close to them, get to know them well, and maybe if they get to know us better, the notion they have about us might change.

I found JA's perspective of wanting a resolution to the conflicts and that he was genuinely open to even being friends with coworkers who were discriminatory towards him absurd in some ways because I would never want that. However, I gave him my full respect and could only imagine what that would feel like to move forward with coworkers who were racist and transphobic.

While reading my interviews with JA, I found myself flabbergasted. I could not have envisioned myself continuing to work in an environment to befriend the people whom I experienced and reported discrimination against. JA was not only concerned with the future working relationships with the people who experienced discrimination but wanted to genuinely have a positive relationship with the white cisgender staff members, too. He shared that he just wanted to be himself and be seen as usual by his coworkers. I was surprised by the thought of wanting to have

a good relationship with the coworkers who caused him harm even while experiencing discrimination. While I listened to him, I reflected on my own experience of dealing with discrimination from white colleagues and felt consistently pessimistic. Unfortunately, at the time of the interview, JA did not receive any outcome from the discrimination investigations. After our interviews, JA had faith everything would be resolved, and he was hopeful.

Antiblackness

Most co-creators in the study were Black transgender staff, while only two self-described multiracial people, one being Black in addition to another racial identity. I would be remiss if I did not explicitly discuss the perpetuation of anti-Blackness the co-creators experienced in their stories of reporting discrimination and lived experiences. Abrica et al.'s (2019) research focused on the experiences of Black cisgender men at community colleges with a majority Hispanic student populations and their experiences of anti-Blackness. Researchers (Garcia, 2018; Dancy et al., 2018) discussed the colonial structures of higher education and included the perpetuation of settler colonialism and the exclusion Black students experience in college.

While Abrica et al.'s (2019) research focused on Black students, I argue the experience of Black staff can be like the experiences of Black college students. Research (Allen, 1992; Bush & Bush, 2010; Harper, 2006) shows that Black male college students experience stereotyping, isolation, alienation, and racial microaggressions from their peers, faculty, and staff members. Due to the oppression and antiblack stereotyping that Black cisgender men face in higher education; I conclude that because of trans misogynoir and antiblackness, Black trans feminine staff in higher education combat a significant amount of discrimination and stereotyping because of their Blackness in combination with their transness. The experiences of antiblackness Black cisgender men face in higher education highlight the potential heightened experiences of

antiblackness that Black trans feminine and masculine people may face as staff in higher education.

Fik shared about how she experienced antiblack racism since her childhood and that she knows it is a part of her life. She shared that antiblack racism not only came into play with her experience of discrimination in higher education but also consistently throughout her life. She shared,

It's a part of what has made me. And always back from when I was in high school being excluded from the debate team, feeling like I'm being excluded from signing up in the high school because I'm Black... so it's always been a part of me. So I always expect that as I grow much into the society... People that I view as people that has more orientation about what it is to identify as what you are, how to be Black, how to be Hispanic.

Fik talked about how they experienced racism and anti-black discrimination in their youth and that it has always been a part of them. Fik shared how she learned about what it meant to be Black, and although she did not give more detail, it reflected the need for Black people to act a certain way that may be more palatable and to be able not to be stereotyped in a negative way and code switch when needed. As Corby discussed previously in the discriminatory rant that her supervisor went on where she spoke poorly about her home country was indicative of antiblackness. Her supervisor went on to talk about how the people from Haiti are like animals in her country. While Corby experienced antiblackness from her supervisor, she also named the importance of navigating higher education as a Black staff member. She shared,

My journey in higher education: I started working in higher education eight years ago, at the age of 31. It was based on a recommendation. A close friend's relative, so I was lucky enough... I had to connect with people- I believe connections helps a lot, especially as a

Black person.

Corby described the need to be connected with people and how those connections sometimes lead to professional and career aspirations. She noted how because she is Black, the professional connections are that much more critical, assumedly, because of racist antiblackness practices in the workplace and hiring.

Although there were descriptions of antiblackness towards the Black co-creators from coworkers, society, and supervisors, the one non-Black co-creator, April, described her institution as antiblack, which caused her to doubt the legitimacy of taking her report of discrimination seriously. April described the climate at her university to be not only toxic, transphobic, and homophobic but also witnessed instances of antiblackness going unaddressed. She shared a time when a staff member from another department used the n-word at an all-staff meeting. Since the Multicultural Center at the institution was brand new, there was an opportunity at a divisional meeting for colleagues to provide feedback about the new center. During another all-staff meeting, staff members in student affairs were invited to give feedback on the new multicultural center. The staff of the multicultural center tried to lead workshops for the center to provide education. Still, they were told that they were rocking the boat by using the term “Queer” in the name of the LGBTQ services programs and were required to change the name from the “Center for Trans and Queer Advocacy” to “LGBTQ Services” not to push boundaries. As colleagues were providing feedback, a staff member who is an administrative coordinator in an academic department made remarks April shared:

The secretary for the Dean of Academic Services, actually went to the mic and said, ‘You know, I don’t want to say that word. What if we were to call the Multicultural Center, the Center for N-word, [expletive], [expletive].’ As she said this, this is a cis white straight

woman saying this to all people of color. The director [Michelle] stood up and said, 'First off, it's called the McDaniels Multicultural Center, now the Multicultural Center. And that was incredibly offensive.' She [secretary] pushed back, 'but I didn't mean it like that.' And she sees the N-word has the same power as queer to me. I was like, then, and just that's where we all walked out where we're just like, so then the response to that. The response was that we were asked by the dean [of students] to start doing Department of Student Affairs dialogues to help our cis-het white majority identity folk talk about why this is improper.

After April shared this with me, I had no words. The actions that took place not only in the staff meeting but also in the response from the Dean of Students to create learning for the white cisgender privileged staff were astoundingly absent. Additionally, requiring the Multicultural Center staff to create the dialogues for understanding without additional or another support route felt it was anti-Black, not including the language used.

While April experienced discrimination and misogynistic treatment as a trans feminine person, she was also hyperaware of her supervisor's positionality as a Black cisgender queer woman to advocate for her staff and not be taken seriously by the Assistant Vice President and Dean of Students. Not only was the department her supervisor oversaw inaugural, but her supervisor was one of the few Black women administrators at the university. She described how the administration had failed her supervisor to even do her job, let alone have her advocate for her staff:

I felt like upper administration had failed her specifically by not giving her the tools to, you know, develop that rapport and time with students by not being able to work so that way she could lead a team....it looked like Michelle was, essentially, while having the

director title, doing the work of a program coordinator because that's all that she was allowed to do.

April's discussion of her empathy for her Black cisgender queer woman supervisor led me to think about the experiences of the Black transgender women co-creators in this study. Wheaton-Greer & Wells (2024) created a framework citing the Black women employee lifecycle, which describes the process of Black women being recruited for employment and ultimately experiencing being pushed out of the organization due to being seen as a threat, being isolated, and experiencing gaslighting in the workplace.

Inconsistent and Dismissiveness of Reports of Discrimination

The following section describes the experiences of reporting discrimination gathered from the interviews. Co-creators had various experiences with reporting discrimination. When co-creators described their experiences of reporting discrimination, their multifaceted and holistic identities were not considered valid by the human resources and/or discrimination officers who received their reports. As Salas-SantaCruz (2021) described, the notions of white supremacy explicitly focus solely on gender identity and not the entirety of a trans person of color, which creates inaccurate depictions of transness that do not reflect the experiences of transgender people of color. Either the claims of discrimination by co-creators were brushed under the rug, or administrators at their institutions wanted the reporting of transgender staff of color's feelings to be tempered. The concerns about discrimination were not seen as a legitimate institutional problem but instead as a one-off instance or singular situation that could be easily remedied and rectified. It was as if institutions were treating a symptom, but not the actual persistent issue of trans misogyny and/or institutionalized racism.

Unhelpful Colleagues

CM talked about her experience of reporting discrimination. Overall, she had challenges with the institution believing her claims were legitimate discrimination, as described above. While she was dehumanized in her discrimination reporting process, she also had challenges with colleagues in her department after she had reported discrimination.

She described the experience of her coworkers being more concerned about her complaining and not going along with the status quo than the actual discrimination she had been experiencing:

I think one of the challenges I faced then was the fact that a lot of my colleagues actually turned on me. They felt like everything was going smoothly and I was just this person who likes disrupting the tranquility around. When I heard that when I learned that I felt reluctance. ‘Maybe I shouldn’t do this, maybe I should, then I felt my hesitation would actually do more harm than good. I felt like, ‘Okay, I don’t care about the peace that you all are enjoying at the moment. I care about my inner peace, the peace in me, the peace in myself, and I care about all the people around,’ the Black students around who are expecting me to have a kind of reaction, who expected me to stand up on behalf of everyone there.

The quote above and CM’s experience are reminiscent of what Ahmed (2021) describes when discussing being a *complainer* and, therefore, *complaining* about the institution. CM was read as a problem herself regardless of the violence committed against her as a Black transgender, two-spirit person. I found her story to be compelling. It reminded me of my own experience of discrimination and reporting when the white cisgender woman against whom I reported discrimination had told me two years after that, “2016 was the worst time of my career,” while not being self-reflective about the violence she committed against me.

Dismissed Reports

Most of the co-creator's reports were not taken seriously, and the institution's response could have been better than expected. This subsection describes instances of dismissal, lack of seriousness from the administration receiving the report at the institution, and how the co-creators describe their experiences of reporting discrimination. April discussed her experience of reporting discrimination and how she felt if she described discrimination of identities that were about disabilities and sexual harassment, which she argued was being misgendered consistently, she would have received a more severe reception from the administration. April visited her human resources department multiple times at Atlantic State University and described experiencing the same response each time she visited. She shared,

I felt that whenever I would go to HR, they would try to appease me as quickly as possible, get me in, get me out, because they weren't taking me seriously. I would be in here for at most 10 to 15 minutes trying to report. They would just get cursory information and follow up, and everything was a follow-up. Everything took so long only to just be passed off. I felt that there was a lot of victim-blaming going on because I am presenting [her gender] in a way that wasn't palatable enough for everyone. It's funny because one of my favorite lectures, when I teach LGBTQ studies, is on passing and passing privilege, especially Casal Sanchez's queer neighborhood of color, how she has to talk about passing as being a lighter skin Chicana and trans.

April was vulnerable in her description of how she was not taken seriously as a transgender multiracial person reporting discrimination because she was not "palatable" enough. She also shared that had she reported other experiences outside of her gender, the reception would have been different, "I felt that if I'd brought up other concerns such as ability-based discrimination or

sexual harassment, which I also argued that not respecting my pronouns was sexual harassment, that that would've been taken more seriously." April shared that she found that human resources did not take the discrimination she was experiencing seriously and that she may have been off-putting to administrators who worked in human resources. While she did not get the reception she was hoping for from human resources, she attempted to provide education even at her office door to try to circumvent instances of discrimination. She shared,

I would put things on my door of like it doesn't matter if someone passes, please respect their pronouns. Things to be very direct about it, and it started to make me think about what microaggressions were happening to other intersectional communities, what was happening to our international community.

April continued to share her concerns about international students who were harassed at Atlantic State University because of other people's obsession, as she called it, with accents and were consistently told that people were having a difficult time understanding them. April found it ironic that while she was at Atlantic State University, the institution was named in its student affairs magazine. Atlantic State University was ranked in the top ten places to work in higher education. April shared about the experience of being purposefully silenced by Title IX administrators. She shared how they would do a walk and talk with her in public instead of meeting with her in an office about her concerns. She said,

It felt like they were being really strategic in suggesting that that way they knew that I wouldn't want to talk about it in public, but I did. I was actually talking very openly and as loud as I could about the details so other people could hear because it just got to a point where I was frustrated.

What happened with April and the purposeful exposure of April's trauma to the public was an intentional strategy to silence her. Her report was not only dismissed, but outright negligence occurred not only on her concerns, but her privacy and psychological empathy.

CM experienced discrimination, as described in a previous section, was rooted in ignorance, dismissal of her identity altogether, and frustration that she had to navigate being outed by colleagues. CM described how she needed a warm response from human resources or her departmental director. She shared,

The reception my report had, my complaint had wasn't as warm as I felt it was going to be. I expected a swift response, I expected a full investigation headed by several committees or at least a dedicated committee. I felt they were nonchalant, but then I took it seriously, and that was when they understood that it really mattered to me.

CM threatened to go to the state board to report her claim was not being taken seriously and she would publicly share what happened to her. Only then did the administration respond to her report more seriously. CM should not have had to threaten potential legal issues with the university to be taken seriously or to have the institution's image threatened.

As described previously, Corby had been berated by her supervisor for not admitting a student to the institution who was not qualified to be admitted. That made her feel her report should have been taken seriously. Her reporting experience was severe in that the administration spoke to her supervisor and addressed the issue privately. While Southern College seemingly addressed her supervisor's behavior, they also followed up with Corby concerningly. She described to me how the institution also responded outside of meeting with her supervisor,

They offered to get me services, mental health services for free. The university would actually take care of that. They offered that, but I didn't feel comfortable with it. I wasn't

really cool with the whole thing. Although eventually, I was told it was actually necessary to evaluate my mental health and how I would be able to handle my role at my job, but then it wasn't really something really deep like that. It was just more like an evaluation after the whole incident and I had gone to see a professional about it.

The fact that Corby had to see and speak to an institutionally designated healthcare provider to confirm she was still mentally fit to continue working in her position was ludicrous. Before Corby shared this with me, I had first heard of this type of mandate and procedure with an employee or of this happening in higher education. I found the requirement for her to see a provider to be questioning her professional abilities and capacity to continue her job and completely took away autonomy from her own decision to seek out mental healthcare from her provider.

Support Systems

The support systems the co-creators had from others included their coworkers and colleagues who encouraged them to report the discrimination they had experienced and decidedly impacted their decision to report discrimination. Some co-creators found support from their supervisors, and others found support from their colleagues and friendships they made in their professional roles. For example, April's supervisor tried to support her as best as possible when she reported discrimination and had to navigate the politics of the person conducting discrimination. As she described, her supervisor was in a difficult position because the Assistant Vice President and Dean of Students were perpetuating the harm to April, who was her supervisor's superior. April knew her supervisor, Michelle, was in a difficult position since she was at-will and needed to balance her role as the director while her supervisor's behavior impacted her assistant director (April). Overall, the supervisors seemed to either negatively

influence the experiences of transgender staff of color reporting discrimination, perpetuate the discrimination, or encourage them to report discrimination. In the findings of this study, there were no supervisors of the co-creators who were neutral in the experience of their transgender staff of color to report discrimination, and each had an active role in the staff members' report of discrimination.

JA had support from other Black transgender people, which motivated him to report discrimination. He shared that a group of Black trans staff members went together to report discrimination to human resources and that they were better as a coalition. He shared, “I didn’t just walk up to his office [human resource administrator] and told him this is what happened. We, the transgender staff of color, we had an agreement. We brought up the ideas together and I took it to the office, so it was a collective agreement.” JA found it helpful to have a collective statement because there were multiple people experiencing discrimination from their white coworkers. He shared he may not have done so if it had not been for the other people who went with him to report discrimination. Not only were his friends who were Black transgender staff there to support him when he reported discrimination, but he knew it would be a more toxic environment had they not experienced the reporting and discrimination together.

Institutional Negligence and Reconciling Emotions After Reporting

Most of the co-creators received institutional negligence in the response to their reports of discrimination, explicitly showing the irresponsible and disingenuous responses institutions gave to the reports and, at times, the dismissal of the concerns of discrimination the co-creators brought forward. Additionally, some of the co-creators had to reconcile their emotions with how they reported discrimination and what that meant for their remaining relationships or existing relationships with people they had experienced discrimination. Some of the co-creators had

different reporting tactics than others in the study. For example, JA, as discussed previously, talked about how he had a coalition of people who went to talk about their experiences of discrimination by white cisgender people in the office. CM spoke about how she was purposefully and strategically outed by her superiors and coworkers during a staff meeting described above as a two-spirit person. To seek a remedy or resolution for the discrimination she faced, she had to be strategic about communicating what she would do if there were no readily available remedies. The experiences of the outcomes and expectations are described in the following sections and emerged as a theme in the data analysis process of this study.

As discussed previously, Amy's reports of discrimination were being put on public display due to the walk and talks that the Title IX investigator had her do. Another instance of negligence was when Amy had gone to the Ombudsperson on campus to resolve an issue with a transphobic student who was required to attend a Safezone Training she was leading for a class. To her dismay, the student began to be disruptive, and the student asked about what genitals Amy had. She shared about visiting the Ombudsperson:

I went talked to them about disruptive student who was being incredibly transphobic got their name, who was there for a class. I was asked [by the Ombudsperson] to apologize to the student and hold a special one-on-one training with them. The student complains that me reporting them [to the Ombuds] and not giving them their class credit for going to the training was harassment.

Amy not only experienced negligence from the Title IX office, which failed to hold a meeting with her in a private space but was being punished for reporting the experience she had with a transphobic student. She had to apologize to the student because the student felt discriminated against as a cisgender person because of her report.

CM had a nontraditional way of getting a response from The Valley State College. Due to negligence and incriminatory behavior by human resources, her reports of discrimination were not taken seriously or seen as valid. She told human resources and her supervisor if her discrimination concerns were not addressed, she would take her concerns to the Board of Accreditation and the Office of Civil Rights to report what happened. She also talked about how initially it felt the institution was trying to ignore what had occurred. She shared,

I was expecting them to call the staff, call a general meeting, ask without me, just sort it out with themselves, but then they said I had to just manage for the time being...It felt like it was messing with my brain, and I felt like I was being cheated. The higher-ups were part of it as well. I thought this was just a way of covering it up...They were trying to sweep it under the rug like nothing really happened...I'm the only Black person, so I expected them to treat it more seriously than they did.

After she called out human resources for failure to respond to her report of discrimination and their lack of addressing any issues, she was required to attend a meeting with her colleagues. She was unaware of the purpose of the meeting. The entire department held a meeting where her immediate supervisors disclosed what had occurred, including CM's gender identity, to everyone in the room. CM felt her supervisors were using her identity as a topic of conversation without her consent and she had no previous knowledge this was the topic of the departmental meeting. Her supervisors made no attempts to consult with her prior to the meeting to obtain her consent to discuss the matter with the entire staff. Her supervisors and administration had exhibited liability and negligence for violating her privacy, identity, and lived experience. She described what occurred in the meeting and how she began to be questioned during the staff meeting about her identity:

...the memo was passed around for all staff to meet at the end of the week...Everyone was called into the conference room...I told them they were trying to interrogate me while I was a victim. I wasn't a suspect or anything. I should have been victimized. Then I was on the defense, right...I shouldn't have been the one defending myself.

Once CM discussed her plans to report the institution to the accreditation board and Office of Civil Rights, they changed their tone. They decided to attempt to address the discriminatory actions. The institution offered her mental health resources to process the stress from what had occurred, and she stated she had not experienced any kind of retaliation.

To my surprise, CM had developed more friendships with her coworkers because she built a relationship with them after the investigation and sought help from the department and university to become more inclusive. She described the outcome as:

As soon as the investigations were over, I think everyone understood how messed up I really was, how miffed I was...how angry I was...They were expecting someone who will just see them and shun them. I never really did that...Instead, I kept them closer. I urged them to be more inclusive, more tolerant, and stuff like that. I think it's really helped the school, my department especially. It's really helped us get closer to each other, to one another.

As CM described her experience, she shared her experience of exploitation had provided an opportunity for growth for the institution and department. The privilege of a college department to learn from the mistake of completely outing a staff member made me consider how getting a learning experience from such a circumstance may not be the way I would view it as a positive and shows the often violent and negligent approach to addressing transgender people of color in higher education. After the institution committed to addressing the discriminatory behavior. CM

spoke about the investigation outcomes and discrimination, which became more publicly known through word-of-mouth on campus. As the word spread throughout campus about CM, there became an increase in LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff wanting to meet with her and thank her for her positive influence on them. She felt her actions of reporting discrimination and the institution's response created a more welcoming environment for other Black queer and transgender people on campus.

Although JA did not have an outcome from his report of discrimination at the time of his participation in the study, he did share he was hopeful for a positive result. He trusted the administrator who received the report. JA also shared his experience building rapport with students and staff with similar identities as him who were Black and/or transgender. He found being vulnerable and sharing his challenges with other Black trans coworkers had a positive experience due to the support he received. This caused him to have the courage to report the discrimination he was facing. JA experienced discrimination from his white cisgender coworkers at Mountain College while serving as an administrative coordinator in an academic department. He worked in coalition with other transgender Black staff to report discrimination together and described this as a collaborative effort. He shared,

Before I reported the case, I didn't just walk up to his office and told him this is what happened, this is what happened. We, the transgender staff of color, we had an agreement. We brought ideas together and took it to the office, so it was a collective agreement...the transgender Black [people] are always there for each other, always there to offer their support in whichever way they can. All I needed was just that support from them to report this.

While I listened to JA talk about his support systems and colleagues with whom he had become friends. These friends were also transgender people of color, I wondered how my own experience would have differed had I had colleagues of similar identities to myself when I reported discrimination. If I had such a support system, I likely would have articulated my needs more clearly and shown less anger in the Title IX investigation meetings. I was happy for JA to have a coalition formed to report discrimination that had occurred. No other co-creators in the study had a support system similar to his. Given his experience of having coworkers so identical to himself and a coalition of support, I wonder how often that type of support exists for other trans staff of color who report discrimination in and outside of higher education.

Summary

As shown in this chapter, the findings of the analysis of the research emerged six themes from the experiences of transgender staff of color reporting discrimination in higher education. As discussed previously, through the analysis utilizing Salas-Santa Cruz's (2021) framework, there came about five themes:

1. White Cissexist Capitalism and Normative Violence,
2. White Cissexist Imperialism in Higher Education,
3. Psychological Demotion and Policing of Transgender Bodies,
4. Inconsistent and Dismissive of the Harm of Transgender Staff of Color, and
5. Institutional Negligence and Reconciliation of Emotions After Reporting.

The white cissexist capitalism and normative violence theme discuss how people are violently socialized to view Black and transgender people in society in the United States and the hypervigilance that the co-creators need to have holistic identities. In the best interest of hegemony theme, I provided specific examples of how co-creators were objectified and treated

as less than human in higher education because of not fitting within the hegemonic white cissexist culture of higher education. White cissexist imperialism in higher education discusses the nature of being controlled by colleagues, students, and supervisors due to their transness and being people of color. The inconsistent and dismissive of the harm of transgender staff of color theme examines the various experiences that each co-creator had in the reception of their reports of discrimination and what happened when they navigated the processes of reporting discrimination. The negligent and inculpatory institutional responses to reports of discrimination show the irresponsible and disingenuous responses that institutions gave to the reports and, at times, the dismissal of the concerns of discrimination the co-creators brought forward. Some co-creators had receptive administrators who were supportive, and others had administrators who dismissed their concerns altogether or tried to temper their concerns. Given the thematic findings of the study, in the next chapter, I discuss the theoretical implications, recommendations for higher education, and future research considerations.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

I never thought the day would come when I would not think about what happened to me regularly or sit in such a frozen state of panic and anxiety that I could not function. I will never forget the times when I broke down in front of my parents and partner, saying I thought I could no longer work and do my job because of the abuse I was experiencing. I was ready to be done with everything and everyone and do what I needed at that moment to numb my feelings.

Although I chose to continue forward in my career, the lasting effects of those memories occasionally come and go in my mind and have made me more conscious of my own identity than before. The research process to understand others' lived experiences of reporting discrimination has been a cathartic and healing experience that will last a lifetime.

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of transgender staff of color who report discrimination in higher education through a constructivist (Crotty, 1998) qualitative methodology. Through in-depth interviews, co-creators shared their stories of navigating their reports of discrimination and their experiences in higher education. The findings of the study provide insight into how transgender staff of color experience discrimination, their lived experiences, and their knowledge of reporting discrimination. In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical implications, recommendations for practice, recommendations for future study, and conclusion.

As I present the recommendations, I am compelled to make clear how grateful I was to the transgender staff of color who have served as co-creators in this study for their vulnerability, authenticity, and willingness to speak their truth. This chapter also provides the advice and thoughts that some co-creators respond to a prompt about what they would like to share with other transgender staff of color in higher education like themselves. The following section describes the study's findings and how they respond to the research questions.

I integrated some of the co-creator's own words about what they would like to see moving forward in higher education related to their experiences of reporting discrimination.

Interview follow-up questions offered to the co-creators included the ability to provide advice or thoughts based on their own experience they wanted to share with administrators, policymakers, and reporting officers in higher education. Some co-creators also provided their perspectives on how they thought supervisors of transgender staff of color in higher education in general and specifically, those who have reported discrimination, would ideally respond and react.

Overview of Findings

The study's design used constructivist qualitative research methodology (Merriam, 2014) and included two in-depth interviews with each co-creator. It is important for qualitative researchers (Merriam, 2014) to build rapport with co-creators by sharing what caused me to do this research and to ask questions that lead co-creators to reflect on their own lived experiences and their experiences of reporting discrimination.

The findings of the study were:

1. White Cissexist Capitalism and Normative Violence,
2. White Cissexist Imperialism in Higher Education,
3. Psychological Demotion and Policing of Transgender Bodies,
4. Inconsistent and Dismissive of the Harm of Transgender Staff of Color,
5. Institutional Negligence and Reconciliation of Emotions After Reporting.

The above themes are each described in depth in the findings chapter of the dissertation. The following sections discuss the lived experiences of transgender staff of color and the experiences reporting discrimination as they relate to current research from the literature review. Further in this chapter, the theoretical implications are discussed with the use of Salas-SantaCruz's (2021) decoloniality for a trans* of color critique, which centers on the holistic existence of Black,

indigenous, and people of color who are transgender whose experiences face inadequacy in white transgender studies.

The Lived Experiences of Transgender Staff of Color

Previous researchers have discussed the experiences of transgender employees, perceptions of transgender employees, transgender faculty in higher education, and experiences of transgender students in higher education (Fogarty & Zheng, 2018; Nicolazzo, 2016; Yu & Lee, 2020; & Yu & Lee, 2021). However, there is little to no research regarding the experiences of transgender staff of color reporting discrimination in higher education (Pitcher, 2017; Siegel, 2019). The thematic findings in this dissertation showcase the extent to which colonial gender assumptions take place, as Salas-SantaCruz (2021) describes the blatant disregard for a holistic existence of transgender people of color, which perpetuates coloniality and the experiences of reporting discrimination in higher education as a transgender staff of color.

As discussed in the findings chapter, multiple themes arose. The themes of *white cissexist capitalism and normative violence*, and *white cissexist imperialism in higher education* stem from the framework of Salas-SantaCruz (2021). Salas-SantaCruz uses the term racial capitalism (Legassik & Hemson, 1973), which they use to discuss how transgender people of color are not seen as valid in their contribution to the ways of knowing in white transgender studies or educational research. I provided a different take on the use of the term racial capitalism and expand upon the term due to the experiences of the transgender staff of color in the study. I combined the problematic behavior of the administrators and institutions of higher education perpetuating colonial views of gender through cissexism and perpetuating whiteness as valued and capitalism through workplace discrimination since they are all systemic structures of

oppression. Therefore, I named these themes *white cissexist capitalism and normative violence*, and *white cissexist imperialism in higher education*.

Co-creators shared normalized, daily violence and the devaluing of their Black and brown bodies in proximation to whiteness and colonial understandings of gender (Driskill, 2016). Additionally, as discussed in the literature review, Anderson et al. (2020) and William's (2013) research found transgender people want to pass to be validated and eliminate the possibility of being discriminated against. As shown in the findings chapter, especially in the themes of *white cissexist capitalism and normative violence* and *white cissexist imperialism in higher education*, this dissertation study reveals how multiple co-creators were mistreatment due to their inability to pass and the social enforcement of regulating their gender expression and identities both inside and outside of higher education. The theme expands to discuss their consciousness of themselves and existing in a cisnormative and white supremacist society. Additionally, the section elaborated on the ignorance of cisgender people and society, which impacts the co-creator's lived experience.

The next theme is *white cissexist imperialism in higher education*, which contains a dearth of information regarding the objectification and eradication of their holistic existence. I named this theme white cissexist imperialism in higher education due to the imperialistic, controlling nature of concepts of professionalism and what is palatable in the proximity of transgender staff of color to whiteness and cisgender identities. The more palatable one is, the more acceptable and tolerable someone is, unlike some of the co-creators who received pushback against their appearance and how they showed up as staff in higher education. Co-creators experienced violent rhetoric towards their holistic existence, dealt with blatant antiblackness from coworkers, and have been were hidden and invisibilized by their colleagues. For example,

April's colleagues told her to wear more makeup and to be considerate of what she was wearing when she did not have time to put on makeup and was wearing a culturally-affirming shirt which reflected her Mexican heritage. She was told she should look more professional.

The policing of bodies of transgender people is not new, as the oldest to date anti-transgender laws written in the United States date back to the early 1840s in the state of Massachusetts, which banned people from wearing a different sex' clothing (Stryker, 2018). Although this is not new, the context and the times matter. This research occurred in 2024 when transgender people are attempting to fight for their literal lives and may not be as concerned about appearing to be professional according to white cissexist capitalistic or imperialistic standards. The theme of *psychological demotion and policing of transgender bodies* theme describes the instances and culture of hiding transgender staff of color that occurred from senior leaders and coworkers, which therefore impacted them. There were instances of co-creators who could no longer do their basic position responsibilities, such as public presentations and tabling outreach for their department. They were also socially excluded from invitations to socialize with colleagues outside of work hours and were prohibited from attending professional development opportunities such as professional conferences.

As discussed in the literature review, research (Jones, 2020) shows Black and Latinx transgender women in higher education are often invisibilized and discriminated against. As discussed in the theme of *psychological demotion and policing of transgender bodies*, the experiences of multiple of the co-creators in the study who are Black or brown and transfeminine have had multiple experiences of being forcibly hidden from the workplace, hidden from public speaking events, and removed altogether from professional development opportunities such as professional conferences or serving on campus committees.

The *inconsistent and dismissive of the harm of transgender staff of color* theme highlights the actual responses and perceptions of the institutional agents who receive reports of discrimination, such as human resources, supervisors, department heads, and Title IX officers. The co-creators often had unhelpful colleagues or supervisors who only perpetuated the harm they experienced with discrimination. Many of the co-creators were dismissed in their reports of discrimination, were not taken seriously by the administration, and at times had to threaten legal action to be seen as having valid concerns. Although they had challenges and roadblocks to reporting, many had robust support systems among their friends, colleagues, and even supervisors who motivated them to report discrimination and supported them through the investigation process.

The co-creators had their *institutional negligence and reconciliation of emotions after reporting* in which they shared the potential of mistrust or trust that the allegations would be taken seriously or addressed appropriately with the people who caused harm. Co-creators spoke about the emotions that were tied to their reports of discrimination. As discussed in the findings chapter, CM and JA both wanted to reconcile with the people who caused them harm and simultaneously wanted their actions addressed. CM discussed how their friends asked them why they were still at The Valley State College. CM responded they would not be pushed out because of what happened to them. Whereas April had decided to leave the Atlantic State University due to the trauma she experienced there. CM, JA, April, Corby, and Fik all described the emotional responsibility they had to report discrimination and how they felt they were speaking for other marginalized people because if they had not reported the discriminatory behavior, then no one would. The weight of other people's experiences in higher education weighed on them and served as a motivator for reporting discrimination.

The Experiences of Reporting Discrimination by Transgender Staff of Color

The data suggest the experiences of transgender staff of color are met with incompetent administrators, inconsistent responses, dismissive responses, and institutional negligence. As mentioned in the findings chapter of the dissertation, only one person in the study, April, went to Title IX to report her discrimination concerns. Although Amy's concerns were about the consistent misgendering of a student, the Title IX officer told her that it was a "misunderstanding" when she wanted to follow up on the report. Clearly, there is a disconnect between the Title IX offices and how the transgender staff of color in the study utilized or did not. While each of the colleges had a Title IX office, the co-creators predominantly shared their concerns with colleagues, their supervisors, or a human resource administrator to attempt to resolve their issues. Although Title IX is a service provider for all campus members, there is concern that their services were not utilized or sought to be an office where concerns of discrimination can be addressed.

The literature review discussed the experiences of transgender women experiencing higher rates of violence in their personal lives compared to other people (Serano, 2007; Spade, 2015). How the co-creators' organizations and coworkers did not view them as desirable, and as a result they were unable to assume positions of authority (Rudin et al., 2014). The Black transgender women and trans feminine staff in the study experienced transmisogynoir (Kacere, 2018) even though they may not have called the phenomenon that themselves. Ultimately, as Nicolazzo (2021b) describes, transgender women and transgender feminine people are disposable, considered laughable, and not taken seriously.

Research (Carrazana & Mithani, 2023; Schilt & Wiswall, 2008) also reveals how transgender women are more likely to experience harassment in the workplace and to be clocked

by colleagues. The experiences of April and Fik explicitly provide examples of their gender expression being questioned as being professional enough, being removed from position responsibilities, removed from leadership activities such as presentations and attending conferences, and even policed their attire by signaling it was not in proximity to whiteness. One example was April being questioned about her Azteca designed attire. This research, along with the co-creators, provides additional insight into the experiences of the transgender staff of color, especially transgender feminine people of color who work in higher education, which builds upon not only higher education research but provides a lens that is not solely about transgender women in white trans studies which is integral to the decolonial trans* of color critique (Salas-SantaCruz, 2021) framework.

The findings in the themes of *inconsistent and dismissive of the harm of transgender staff of color* and *institutional negligence and reconciliation of emotions after reporting* build upon Ahmed's (2021) and Rudein et al.'s (2014) research on the supervisor's role in reports of discrimination and employer's response to meeting transgender employee's needs in compliance. As shown in the experiences of April and CM, the initial response was outright dismissal. April went multiple times to human resources, the ombudsperson, and Title IX to state her concerns with how she and the students with whom she worked were being treated without any resolution to the issues. CM threatened to contact the office of civil rights in their state and get the accreditation board involved for the institution to take their concerns seriously. The finding of April's regulation and control to abide by the hegemonic culture reflects Salas-SantaCruz's (2021) notions in the decoloniality for a trans* of color critique of educational criticism framework where they describe the essential need for discourse on ethnicity, race, and lived experiences about and for transgender people of color. Often, the co-creators were forced to be

hidden from others in the institution and out of public view due to their being transgender at the college or university where they were employed. The following sections provide explicit examples from the interviews of the co-creators that show how this inhumane and violent behavior occurred.

Rudin et al.'s (2014) research show when cisgender supervisors comply with nondiscrimination policies in the workplace and hold other cisgender employees accountable for discriminatory actions, it creates a more inclusive environment for transgender employees. As she described in a previous section, April was discriminated against because of her race, ethnicity, gender identity, gender expression, and ability, which in turn cannot be encompassed by white trans studies (Salas-SantaCruz, 2021). Still, these experiences of discrimination and lack of seriousness by human resources only perpetuate the need for pluralistic ontological and epistemological perspectives of trans of color futures Salas-SantaCruz (2021) describes as necessary ways of combating colonial constructs of binary gender. April did not have to fit into a “binary” of her attire, presentation, or lack of passing, but should have been able to simply exist.

Unfortunately, April and CM did not have a supportive institutional response, and April gave grace to her supervisor as an at-will employee who was a cisgender Black woman trying to navigate a new problematic supervisor, the dean of students. Given the limited research on the experiences of transgender staff and faculty (Pitcher, 2017; Siegel, 2019), this dissertation research is essential for higher education institutions, administrators, and policymakers to take immediate action to address the inequities occurring in their transgender staff of color. The next sections discuss practical recommendations for administrators, supervisors, and higher education institutions based off of the research provided in this study.

While institutions are rarely held accountable, if at all for the violence enacted on transgender staff of color or other people of color. The collective memory, oral history and kinship exhibited in the research is significant to the ability for transgender staff of color to continue to exist in higher education. When JA reported instances of discrimination by white colleagues with other Black transgender staff, a movement and support system began and carried from his colleagues to ensure they were taking care of one another. The kinship provided to one another can create a more comfortable environment for someone to report if they have the support from people like themselves.

Theoretical Implications: Decoloniality for a Trans* of Color Critique

The study was informed by the decoloniality for a trans* of color critique (Salas-SantaCruz, 2021), which in itself is informed by sociality grounded ontological and existential pluralism as well as alternative conceptual tools to understand Black, Indigenous, and Latinx and other people of color transgender expansive views in education (Anzaldua, 1987; Bey, 2017; Driskill, 2011; Lugones, 2007; Pitts, 2021; Reed, 2022; Tinsley, 2000). The framework used in the study by Salas-SantaCruz (2021) highlighted and directly addressed the experiences of the co-creators other frameworks did not when considering the multifaceted experiences of the staff involved in the study.

The co-creators spoke about their experiences as Black, multiracial, Latinx transgender people in higher education, which affected their daily lives, workplace, ability to conduct their work effectively, and desire to stay in their professional positions. As Salas-SantaCruz (2021) notes, using a decolonial philosophy is committed to transcending away from the Euro-centrist knowledge systems and ways of knowing gender because of colonization white trans studies can perpetuate. Therefore, the co-creators described the need to, at times, re-engage and center their

indigenous and authentic selves, which conflicted with the hegemonic culture in the United States and views of gender and gender expression. Each co-creator spoke about their pride in being Black, multiracial, Latinx, and transgender. However, because society perceives people like the co-creators as people who are disrupting societal norms, the disruption can cause ignorant people, such as their colleagues or supervisors, to engage in discriminatory practices in higher education.

April spoke about how white supremacist expectations of professionalism caused her to reconsider how she shows up to work as a staff member,

How that white supremacist narrative of business professional of policing identity and gender performance, that was huge. It made me even feel like I couldn't wear anything that related back to either of my identities. If I wore my favorite hoodie that has the Azteca design...I would be called out because that's too bold.

April had consistent experiences of needing to self-police her attire and gender expression because of the responses she would get from coworkers. At the time of experiencing discrimination, she identified as genderfluid and was never seen as a woman or as woman enough. Others told her she was a guy because she did not always appear hyper-feminine enough. She shared,

'Oh, but you're still a guy.' I was like, 'I'm not a man.' 'Oh, but you're not a woman.' I was like, 'No, I'm trans fem.' It felt like a lot of times, they were trying to figure out what to do to me because I didn't fit in any of those boxes because they didn't know how to approach me. I just need to be dealt with and just put away because it breaks their brain too much.

The examples described above about April's experiences of having her transgender identity policed show the how wholeness of her multiple identities that Salas-SantaCruz (2021) describes as the inability of the Western lens of gender and white transgender studies to understand transgender people of color in education. Westernized views of gender and transgender people of color cannot grapple with the fragmentation and non-human distinction that has a hold on transgender imaginaries and practices, which fails to address the pluriversality as the multitude of reflections of knowledge and trans-genealogies for trans* of color futures. April's existence as someone who did not fit into a white-centric and colonial understanding or white trans viewpoint of existence created a violent response from others because of her expression of herself and the multiple identities she held.

Another example of the significant theoretical implications of a decolonial trans* of color critique to the co-creators is the experiences of CM, who was a two-spirit African trans feminine person. She shared in her stories that she felt that people did not understand her because of the lack of awareness of two-spirit Black people like herself. She shared after being outed by a coworker unbeknownst to her,

I saw the way people were looking [at me] has changed... I never knew they had heard that I was two-spirit...maybe a lot of people don't really understand what it means to be a two-spirit person. They presume it's just an actual personality disorder...I thought it was just a minor issue until it started affected my efficiency and effectiveness at work.

As Salas-SantaCruz (2021) theorizes, there is a need for ways of knowing of Black, two-spirit transgender knowledge and they state, "...Black (trans)genders, Two-Spiritedness, and Jotx identities/embodiments...are not just forms of racialized forms of trans expressions and identities; they are complex ways of relating, being, and existing within and despite coloniality,

and they constitute trans* of color resistant imaginations and relations... (p. 6).” Therefore, theoretical implications need to be considered in future research for those like Salas-SantaCruz’s (2021) theoretical framework.

Additions I would recommend to the conceptual framework based on the findings of this study include addressing pervasive antiblackness that occurs against Black transgender staff, which was shown to be perpetuated not only by non-Black people most often in the study but perpetuated by Black cisgender men in the study that the co-creators discussed. As will be discussed further, I add the concepts I named in the findings chapter on white cissexist capitalism and white cissexist imperialism, which happens to the transgender staff of color in the study. In the following sections, I elaborate on how those thematic concepts arose from the decolonial trans* of color critique (Salas-SantaCruz, 2021) framework.

Another theoretical implication is the institutional negligence of the colleges and universities reflected in the study by the co-creators. The core of negligence is the lack of care, which in turn posits there needs to be other sources of care for those who are neglected. Therefore, the transgender staff of color in the study who experienced institutional neglect were left to fend for themselves, lean on other colleagues, and their own loved ones to push through the process of reporting discrimination. Self-care, community care, and kinship as previously discussed are an implication of examination of the neglect experienced by the co-creators. Additionally, Patel (2014) discusses knowledge of property is that educational researchers need to engage in research that creates answerability to people such as transgender staff of color versus creating knowledge to own knowledge as property.

The concept of knowledge as property is built from Harris’ (1993) whiteness as property. Due to the power assemblages Salas-SantaCruz (2021) discusses—which are deemed as creating

who has information and has power in creating knowledge of: coloniality, racial capitalism, and imperialism—researchers need to push against the concept of owning knowledge and gatekeeping who can create knowledge and who’s knowledge is valid such as those of transgender staff of color in higher education.

Recommendations for Higher Education Practice and Policy

Recommendations include my recommendations as a researcher as well as recommendations from the co-creators. In my discussions with the co-creators, I ensured they had the chance to share their recommendations for policymakers, administrators, and staff who receive reports of discrimination based on their own experience reporting discrimination. I provide recommendations and considerations for human resources and Title IX officers to learn from this research study. Recommendations are framed as practical considerations for practitioners. In another section, I discuss recommendations for future research and considerations for researchers based on the findings of this dissertation.

Recommendations for Human Resource and Title IX Officers

The study’s findings show the importance of competence as an administrator, consciousness as a supervisor of supervisee’s identities, and structural understanding of the implications of reporting discrimination on marginalized people. The following subsections describe the recommendations shared by the co-creators from the interviews and the author’s recommendations as a researcher. Additionally, the recommendations for higher education administrators include practice and reflective considerations of the privilege they bring to their positions of power on college campuses. Human resource administrators in the study, as shared by the co-creators, are inadequately trained, staffed, and incompetent regarding responses to discrimination regarding transgender identities. As co-creators discussed, the process of

reporting discrimination via the human resource offices was inhumane, violent, and oftentimes dismissive of the emotional and psychological exploitation that transgender staff experienced because of reporting discrimination.

The data suggest there is a disconnect between the Title IX office and the staff involved in the study. Therefore, Title IX offices and officers should question the accessibility, awareness of services, and visibility are the larger campus community they serve. The significance of the work of Title IX should not only rest upon the needs of the students, but the faculty and staff of the institution as well.

Create Affirmative Policies and Practices

Regarding human resource offices and administrators who oversee the workplace accommodations and policies, Fik discussed the ability to be covert and pass in the remote work environment. While she had to return to the office when the governmental shutdowns were lifted, she had a difficult time maintaining work, clients, and respectful relationships with her colleagues. Therefore, not only should more research be done on the impact of remote work on transgender staff of color, but practices should be in place to accommodate the gender dysphoria, violence, and harm done by cisgender staff to transgender staff of color when clocking takes place in higher education. Additionally, in the case that gender dysphoria as a diagnosis remains in the medical industrial complex, there should be reasonable accommodations to alleviate the instances of transphobia that takes place by removing the necessity to work in place, even in a hybrid format.

Additionally, as discussed previously with Salas-SantaCruz's (2021) framework, current policies in Title IX and discrimination, harassment, and retaliation extrapolate identities among transgender people of color. For example, someone who is Latinx has a holistic existence of

being Latine and nonbinary and experiences discrimination in a multifaceted way. However, policies commonly only examine the Latine and nonbinary identities individually, rather than as a collective and intersected component of identity. Therefore, policymakers, governmental affairs, and external power assemblages external to higher education who create such policies need to enact proper and appropriate policies which reflect the whole existence of people like transgender staff of color in higher education.

Reconcile and Contemplate One's Power and Policies

The findings indicate the need for administrators who oversee and implement receiving reports of discrimination, whether it be in human resources, Title IX officers, or supervisors, to reflect and consider the power dynamic at play when someone reports discrimination. As vulnerable as a Black, indigenous, or person of color who is a transgender staff member, the power differential is apparent, yet often only noted by the person bringing the complaint. Multiple times throughout the interviews, co-creators mentioned their reports were not taken seriously by administrators, which the co-creators thought was due to their transness or being a person of color is not seen as a valid concern compared to other protected identities. The invalidation of discriminatory experiences should not occur or be questioned by administrators who receive reports of discrimination because there will be missed opportunities to investigate discriminatory actions, which can lead to mistrust of the institution. Cisgender people in general in higher education and elsewhere should hold one another accountable. Accountability does not necessarily have to include broad organizational changes, but the actions and conversations that lead to that accountability should occur among cisgender people instead of enacting the labor on transgender people.

There are many instances of transgender staff of color and in general, LGBTQ people of color pushing back in higher education through the creation and implementation of programs and services to create affirmative environments for people like themselves in higher education. Additionally, the actual existence of transgender people of color in higher education (students, staff, and faculty) is viewed as a form of pushback against a hegemonic white supremacist culture. Additionally, having accomplices in positions of power is a responsibility that should not be taken lightly where institutional change can occur and should not be taken for granted. Cisgender and white people in positions of power should not only reconcile their power and privilege, but enact it for the greater good.

Have Better Quality Responding Administrators

The co-creators consistently discussed the need for administrators who oversee Title IX offices, human resources, and departmental heads to do better overall to serve people like themselves. The findings show that multiple administrators who received reports of discrimination were ignorant of the experiences of transgender people of color, which caused the staff members to bear the burden of educating them or providing information about the experiences of transgender people as a group. All administrators who receive reports of discrimination should be competent enough to provide adequate services and support to people of all gender identities and lived experiences. The labor should not be the responsibility of the reporting party to educate their supervisors, department heads, Title IX officers, deans, or other campus leaders. Nor should it fall solely on the LGBTQ serving departments or LGBTQ people themselves.

Given the findings of the study, there are consistent concerns regarding discriminatory practices, lack of accountability and seriousness of the cases, and the requirement of

administrators to treat transgender people of color's concerns as legitimate. Administrators who receive reports of discrimination must make changes in their own (un)conscious biases about transgender people and people of color because, admittedly, I agree there are circumstances in which people are very aware of their discrimination.

Colleagues and Supervisors of Transgender Staff of Color: Interrogate Internalized Transphobia and Trans Misogynoir

First, colleagues and supervisors who are cisgender supervising and/or working with transgender people of color question why there is a need to attempt to figure out someone else's gender. The co-creators discussed the experience of being clocked by their colleagues and supervisors in higher education and should interrogate why this happens. The experience of being clocked or their gender expression being policed happened more frequently for transgender feminine people in the study, who are all women of color. There is no essential business need or purpose for detecting one's gender identity. The curiosity of wanting to know about someone's gender may be due to genuine ignorance. However, there is a responsibility for a cisgender person, especially those in power, to unpack the curiosity surrounding this wonder and engage in self-education because of the negative consequences of violence and dehumanization if these curiosities are acted upon. Additionally, given the co-creators were mostly Black transgender people who experienced anti-Black racism, there is a need for competency of the bias associated with not believing Black people or gaslighting them as staff members who did experience discrimination.

Recommendations for Higher Education Institutions

Higher education institutions are responsible for the climate, culture, and response from institutions on how reports of discrimination are handled. The responsibilities fall among the

presidents of colleges, vice presidents, and senior-level administrators who implement and practice what policies state regarding about addressing violations of non-discrimination policies, harassment, and retaliation. Therefore, higher education institutions need to reconsider and reexamine the process and procedures of reporting on their campuses.

Re-examine Processes and Procedures of Reporting

The current structure and reporting procedures are inadequate. There needs to be critical evaluation and forethought about the structure of reporting. Notably, none of the co-creators submitted a report to their Title IX office, and they all reported their concerns to human resources or their superiors. No people in the study reported discrimination to the Title IX office; this indicates a distrust of the office or the lack of awareness of such an office existing at their college campus and the procedures or accessibility of this type of office. The thematic findings indicate the change required for the repeated traumatization of re-telling and attempting to convince administrators that discriminatory behavior occurred. Administrators need to re-examine the processes and protocol of reporting discrimination because people reporting need to educate administrators about transgender people. There is mishandling of information which, as in the case of one co-creator, has caused people to be outed to their colleagues and, in some cases, only the threat of legal action caused administrators to take reports of discrimination more seriously. Processes and procedures need to be re-examined and should consider the most marginalized populations to ask: How does this serve the most marginalized people who are least likely to report discrimination?

A more holistic understanding of identity- and trans people of color-informed processes and procedures for reporting discrimination is needed, and not only one that defaults to other identities that experience harm. One action that can create a more holistic understanding of

transgender staff of color's experiences of discrimination should include a full review of the climate for transgender people of color on their campuses.

While one potential action institutions of higher education should take is an increase in hiring transgender people of color in positions of supervision, if the institution fails to recognize and address the violence and dehumanization against transgender people of color, there will be no change. Higher education staff who have competent supervisors who will not exploit or seek to objectify them and hire them for senior-level positions, to receive discrimination reports, and in supervisory roles is needed. Additionally, chief diversity officers should be hired not only placeholders for institutions to alleviate concerns of litigation, but as experts who understand how to support people with multifaceted identities, such as those in the study.

Transparency and Accountability of Reporting

The co-creators spoke about the need for transparency, accountability, and staff support from higher education institutions. College campuses need transparent information about the number of discrimination reports received and the outcomes without disclosing specific individuals involved. Providing this information creates trust among the campus population and those most affected by discrimination. Having an anonymous reporting system could increase the ability for people to report harassment or discrimination due to the concern about being identified when reporting discrimination or harassment in higher education. An anonymous form and reporting structure, while limited in addressing those who submitted a report, has the capability to examine campus trends.

Given the evidence provided in this study, there are obvious gaps in higher education with the lack of consequences of violent white cissexist imperialistic behavior, lack of accountability, and the practices of transmisogynoir, antiblackness, cissexist violence and white

cissexist capitalism in higher education will only continue. Administrators and policymakers should know better than to practice and/or support the dehumanizing practices that occurred in this study. These behaviors only feed into the culture of a broken system for transgender people of color.

Recommendations for Future Study

In concluding this specific study on the lived experiences of transgender staff of color who report discrimination in higher education, there is an appeal for participation from transgender faculty of color. More faculty and lecturers responded to the recruitment form on Qualtrics for this study than staff members. However, due to the definition of staff in the research study, faculty and lecturers were excluded from the pool of participants. Moving forward, my research will continue the research methodology and conceptual framework but more specifically focus on transgender people of color in higher education who are faculty, lecturers, and students who have reported discrimination.

Remote Work and Affirming Policies

The safety of Zoom and remote work emerged in the findings. Fik specifically talked about the ability to not be as “out” visibly to the campus community, which may have delayed the discriminatory actions she faced when she returned to campus in person. Given Fik’s experience of navigating a Zoom workplace environment before starting in-person at her university, the climate and policing of her Black trans body was different from it had been when she was fully remote. Her experience led me to recommend an exploratory study focusing on the discriminatory experiences of Black transgender staff in higher education or other faculty or students in higher education who can work exclusively online compared to those who do not. While undoubtedly faculty, staff, and students who are transgender people of color experience

discrimination, research needs to be done to understand those experiences to determine whether the experiences of discrimination look different in a remote environment.

Antiblackness and Transfeminine Staff

While this study had components of antiblackness in the findings section, there should be more dedicated studies on this topic related to the experiences of Black transgender women or feminine people who serve as staff at colleges and universities and their experiences. The discriminatory misogynistic experiences of Black and other trans feminine women of color who are staff in higher education were apparent in the study even from and among other Black and Latinx people of color who played a role in perpetuating antiblackness in the experiences of the co-creators. Therefore, this specific experience of staff in higher education should be studied further to address colonial and white supremacist norms that create this type of hostile environment.

Experiences of Faculty of Color Reporting Discrimination

Research should be conducted on the experiences of transgender faculty, lecturers, and adjunct faculty in higher education who report discrimination. In the survey seeking study participants, I received over thirty responses from people who submitted the form whose position was in academic teaching. More faculty and lecturers responded to the recruitment form transgender than staff members. Due to the definition of staff in this dissertation, faculty, adjunct faculty, and lecturers were excluded from the pool of participants. More research needs to be done by, with, and for transgender people of color in these roles because the power dynamics they experience in these roles may be different than the mostly at-will staff in higher education.

Reflection and Conclusion

At the beginning of this final chapter of the dissertation embodies the anxieties, worries, and abuse I experienced from multiple supervisors as a transgender Latinx person of color. The in-depth interviews I have had with each co-creator in this study were both cathartic and caused me to re-live my harm. The findings show the need to re-examine how practitioners, senior leaders in higher education, and higher education institutions structure their policies and implement responses to reports of discrimination from Black, indigenous, and people of color who are transgender staff members. The goal of the study was to understand the lived experiences and stories of transgender staff of color who have reported discrimination in higher education, which created rapport and affirmation from co-creators. I both saw myself in them, and they were glad this study took place to bring awareness and light to experiences such as theirs.

I am incredibly grateful for the authenticity, vulnerability, and genuine care that co-creators had with sharing their journeys on such an important topic of study. While much of what the co-creators shared brought back memories and anxieties I experienced with supervisors, I also felt liberation through the findings of this study because Black, indigenous, and transgender people of color should be believed, should be affirmed, and should be valued in higher education and as humans. The findings in the study impacted me professionally and personally to know I was not alone in the struggle to exist and have appropriate responses to my concerns about discrimination.

The research has also created more of a flame for me to be motivated and continue to do the advocacy, support, and equity in higher education for marginalized populations. As I move forward in my career to obtain more senior-level positions as an administrator, I will always recall what it meant to share space with other transgender staff of color and to ensure that,

moving forward, I create more equitable and humane outcomes that supervisors and administrators should provide for their staff.

I hope administrators, senior-level leaders in higher education, and cisgender people take the study as a note to re-examine one's own privilege bias and address violent behavior that dehumanizes and ultimately causes transgender people the potential to cease to exist. The progress, development, and completion of my dissertation have been a life-changing experience as a researcher, administrator, and human.

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APPENDIX A

Recruitment Email

Dear [NAME]:

I am conducting a research study about the stories and lived experiences of transgender staff of color that have reported discrimination based on gender identity at their workplace in higher education. Participation will take about three hours in total of your time. The time will include two semi-structured interviews. If you are interested in participating, please email me at bri.serrano@colostate.edu, and you will receive further instructions in a separate email. Each participant will receive a \$100 Amazon Gift card as compensation for their time. There are minimal risks involved in this research, including vulnerability to experiences of discrimination that may bring about emotions.

If you have any questions, please let me know.

Bri Sérráno, Ph.D. Candidate, Colorado State University
bri.serrano@colostate.edu

Principal Investigator:
Kari Dockendorff, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Colorado State University
kari.dockendorff@colostate.edu

APPENDIX B

Reminder Message About the Scheduled Interview

Hi [NAME],

This is a reminder you have signed up to participate in a research study about the stories and lived experiences of transgender staff of color that have reported discrimination based on gender identity at their workplace in higher education. You are scheduled to complete the study on [date] at [time]. The study will be conducted via Zoom.

If you have any questions, please contact:

Bri Sérrano, Ph.D. Candidate, Colorado State University
bri.serrano@colostate.edu

Principal Investigator:
Kari Dockendorff, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Colorado State University
kari.dockendorff@colostate.edu

APPENDIX C

Follow-Up Email After Interview

Hi [NAME],

Thank you for participating in this research!

Please note you have completed the [interview number] and have [interview amount] interview(s) remaining. Please ensure that you complete your art project (if applicable) prior to our next interview date on [date] at [time] on Zoom. I will send a follow-up email two days prior to our scheduled time to meet again as a reminder.

If you have any questions about this project, contact Principal Investigator Kari Dockendorff, Ph.D. at: kari.dockendorff@colostate.edu or Bri Sérrano at: bri.serrano@colostate.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the CSU IRB at: RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu ; 970-491-1553.

Thank you,

Bri Sérrano, Ph.D. Candidate, Colorado State University
bri.serrano@colostate.edu

Principal Investigator:
Kari Dockendorff, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Colorado State University
kari.dockendorff@colostate.edu

APPENDIX D

Sample Consent Form with Audiotaping

Colorado State University

Consent to Participate in Research

The Stories and Lived Experiences of Transgender Staff of Color that Report Gender Identity Discrimination in Higher Education

(Designate any subject sub-group here, e.g., 'Community Members')

Introduction and Purpose

My name is Bri Sérráno. I am a graduate student at Colorado State University, working with my faculty advisor, Assistant Professor Kari Dockendorff, Ph.D. in the School of Education. I invite you to participate in my research study on the stories and lived experiences of transgender staff that report discrimination based on gender identity at their workplace in higher education.

Procedures

If you agree to participate in my research, I will interview you at a time on Zoom. The interviews will involve questions about discrimination, transgender identity, and experiences reporting discrimination. It should last about 90 minutes. With your permission, I will audiotape and take notes during the interviews. The recording is to accurately record the information you provide and will be used for transcription purposes only. If you choose not to be audiotaped, I will take notes instead. If you agree to be audiotaped but feel uncomfortable or change your mind for any reason during the interview, I can turn off the recorder at your request. Or, if you don't wish to continue, you can stop the interview at any time.

I expect to conduct two interviews in total; however, follow-ups may be needed for added clarification. I will contact you by mail/phone to request this. I will also email you the transcribed interview to ensure accuracy and my final chapter of results in my study for transparency.

Benefits

There is no direct benefit to you from taking part in this study. It is hoped that the research will provide trans-centered and trans-informed research about the experiences of transgender staff with reporting procedures and the climate of equity offices and protocols.

Risks/Discomforts

While there is minimal risk in participating in this study, the questions and interview may bring about uncomfortable feelings related to participants' experiences reporting discrimination. Some of the research questions may make you uncomfortable or upset. If you experience discomfort or upset during the interview and/or afterward I will provide resources such as mental health non-profits for you to connect with if you would like. Additionally, throughout the interviews, you are free to decline to answer any questions you don't wish to and/or stop the interview at any time.

As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality could be compromised; however, we are taking precautions to minimize this risk.

Confidentiality

Your study data will be handled as confidentially as possible. In the case that data is compromised, results of the study are presented and/or published, individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used if you select to have a pseudonym.

To minimize the risks to confidentiality, we will keep data from transcripts and audio recordings in a password-protected computer, drive, and within encrypted folders. The transcripts will also be stored in a password-protected and encrypted database on Dedoose.com.

I will transcribe the audio recordings as soon as possible after the interview and then destroy the original recordings after this is complete. When the research is completed, I will save the transcriptions and other study data for possible use in future research done by myself or others. I will retain the records of transcripts and notes no longer than seven years after the study is complete. The same measures described above will be taken to protect the confidentiality of this study data. We may be asked to share the research files with the sponsor or the CSU Institutional Review Board ethics committee for auditing purposes. Your identity/record of receiving compensation (NOT your data) may be made available to CSU officials for financial audits.

Compensation

To thank you for participating in this study, you will receive a \$100 Amazon gift card for participation immediately after you complete all interviews and requirements of the study.

Rights

Participation in research is completely voluntary. You are free to decline to take part in the project. You can decline to answer any questions and are free to stop participating in the project at any time. Whether or not you choose to participate in the research and whether or not you choose to answer any questions or continue participating in the

project, there will be no penalty to you or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Questions

If you have any questions about this research, please contact me at 760-219-0701 or bri.serrano@colostate.edu. You may also contact Principal Investigator Kari Dockendorff at kari.dockendorff@colostate.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the Colorado State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 970-491-1381, or e-mail RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu.

CONSENT

Do you consent for your interview to be audiotaped?

___ Yes

___ No

Please sign and date below if you wish to participate in this study. You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Participant's Name (*please print*)

Participant's Signature

Date

Optional:

Please sign and date below if you would prefer to have your name or other identifying information to be included in all final reports, publications, and/or presentations resulting from this research.

Participant's Signature

Date

APPENDIX E

Institutional Research Board

Adult Participation Informed Consent

Department of Higher Education Leadership

Participant Study Title: The Stories and Lived Experiences of Transgender Staff of Color that Report Gender Identity Discrimination in Higher Education

Formal Study Title: *Transforming Reporting Discrimination in Higher Education: A Narrative Inquiry Study of Transgender Staff of Color Reporting Discrimination*

List the title in this section exactly as it appears on the IRB Application.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Kari Dockendorff, Ph.D., Assistant Professor

STUDENT INVESTIGATOR(S): Bri Sérráno

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

For questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Bri Sérráno at 760-219-0701.

For questions regarding research subjects' rights and any complaints or comments regarding how the study is being conducted, contact the CSU Institutional Review Board at: RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu; 970-491-1553.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

This study aims to understand why transgender staff reports discrimination in higher education.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

You are being asked to participate in the study because you fit these criteria:

- Identify as any of the following: Jotx/a/o, Stud, Femme, Boi, AG, Masc-of-Center, Femme-of-Center, Latinx/e, Filipinx, trans femme, Mahu, Two-Spirit, trans masc, or transgender

- Be Black, Indigenous, Multiracial, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and/or a Person of Color
- Be a non-student staff member in higher education at time of reporting discrimination
- You have reported discrimination based on gender identity to the office that receives formal reports of discrimination at your current or previous employer in higher education
- Formal investigation of discrimination report has concluded and you have received final results of findings

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE, AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The study will be conducted via Zoom and include two 45-90 minute interviews. If you would like, there will be an opportunity to review the interview transcript and the dissertation results in the results chapter.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

- Participate in two 45-90 minute semi-structured interviews via Zoom
- Have the option to review transcripts from the interview to ensure accuracy
- Have the option to review the results chapter from the study

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There may be no direct benefit to you as a participant in this study. However, we hope to learn more about the experiences of transgender staff reporting discrimination in higher education which can inform the protocol of equity offices and have trans-centered and informed research.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

While there is minimal risk in participating in this study, the questions and interview may bring about uncomfortable feelings related to participants' experiences reporting discrimination. Some of the research questions may make you uncomfortable or upset. You are free to decline to answer any questions you don't wish to or stop the interview anytime.

As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality could be compromised; however, we are taking precautions to minimize this risk.

WILL I RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

You will be compensated for participating in this research.

To thank you for participating in this study, you will receive a \$100 Amazon gift card for participation immediately after completing all interviews and study requirements.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE?

Your study data will be handled as confidentially as possible. Suppose the results of this study are published or presented. In that case, individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used if you want a pseudonym for the study.

To minimize the risks to the confidentiality, we will keep data from transcripts and audio recordings in a password-protected computer and encrypted folders. The transcripts will also be kept in a password-protected and encrypted database on Dedoose.com.

We will transcribe the audio recordings as soon as possible after the interview and then destroy the original recordings after this is complete. When the research is completed, I will save the transcriptions and other study data for possible use in future research done by myself or others. I will retain these records of transcripts and notes indefinitely after the study is over. The same measures described above will be taken to protect the confidentiality of this study data. We may be asked to share the research files with the sponsor or the CSU Institutional Review Board ethics committee for auditing purposes. Your identity/record of receiving compensation (NOT your data) may be made available to CSU officials for financial audits.

Mandatory Report

You should know, however, that there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court OR *to tell authorities if we believe you have abused a child or pose a danger to yourself or someone else.*

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or any part. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with CSU. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or at any time during the research study.

Participant Consent:

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and voluntarily wish to participate in this research. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 4 pages.

Signature of the person agreeing to take part in the study

Date

The printed name of the person agreeing to take part in the study

Name of person providing information to participant

Date

Signature of Research Staff

APPENDIX F

Participants Screening Form

Project Title: The Stories and Lived Experiences of Transgender Staff of Color that Report Gender Identity Discrimination in Higher Education

Faculty Co-Principal Investigator: Dr. Kari Dockendorff, Colorado State University

Principle Investigator: Bri Sérráno, Ph.D. Candidate, Colorado State University

Instructions:

Please provide the following information to be considered for participation in the study:

1. Name
2. Email Address
3. Phone Number
4. Pseudonym to be used in the study:
5. Name of institution where reporting took place:
6. Type of institution where reporting took place:
7. What is the functional you were/are in when you reported discrimination?
8. Please describe your gender identity and race and/or ethnicity:
9. Your professional title at the institution when you reported and experienced discrimination:
10. Have you reported discrimination based on gender identity to the office that receives formal reports of discrimination at your current or previous employer in higher education?
 - If please confirm that the process of the investigation of discrimination has been completed and there is no current or ongoing litigation related to the discrimination that is of topic in this study.
11. Why are you interested in engaging in this study?

Thank you for completing this participant screening form.

I will contact you if you qualify to participate in this study.

APPENDIX G

Interview 1

45-90 minutes

The interview will be semi-structured and I will share the purpose of the study, confidentiality procedures, and see if the co-creator has any questions before we begin. I will prioritize the first three questions and use the additional ones if necessary. I will ask follow-up questions if necessary to clarify responses.

- 1) Tell me about yourself. What is your story of being in higher education?
- 2) Please share with me about your racial, ethnic, and gender identities. How do you identify?
- 3) What have been your experiences of your identities as a trans staff of color (or use another term based on how the co-creator describes themselves) and experiences of discrimination in your role(s)?
- 4) Please tell me about your experience of reporting discrimination.

APPENDIX H

Interview #2

45-90 minutes

The second interview will focus on what the experience has been like to report discrimination and provide opportunities for clarification or additions to the information provided from previous interviews.

- 1) How do you think being a person of color and transgender (or what term they use to describe themselves) impacted your experience reporting discrimination based on gender identity in higher education?
- 2) What challenges or barriers did you face when reporting discrimination based on gender identity as a trans staff of color in higher education?
- 3) What was the response from the higher education institution when you reported discrimination based on gender identity? What would be your hopes for different experiences for people or yourself reporting discrimination in the future based on your experience?
- 4) Is there anything you would like to add or change about what has been shared in the interviews?