

**A place to stand:
Creating inclusive environments
for diverse gender tertiary students**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the experiences of students with diverse gender identities within the New Zealand tertiary environment. The aim was to hear directly from participants about whether they had experienced discrimination in relation to their gender identities; what kinds of discrimination, if any, were occurring; and whether participants believed specific strategies might support an inclusive tertiary environment for diverse gender students. The study draws on semi-structured interview data gathered from seven diverse gender students currently studying at a tertiary level around New Zealand. Participants had a range of gender identities, ethnicities and institutional experiences; however, this study did not include anyone from the intersex community. The interview transcripts were thematically analysed and the initial themes were shared with participants to seek feedback about perceived fit with their own experiences. As the researcher is a ciswoman (a woman assigned female at birth), a consultation group was formed to provide support and feedback from diverse gender perspectives to the researcher. Findings indicate that although the participants did not generally identify as having experienced discrimination through direct attacks or violence, the negative effects of gender-normativity, administration processes that were not suitable, and a lack of staff awareness about the needs of diverse gender students were clear evidence of discrimination during the participants' tertiary experiences. Findings also highlight the resilience of gender diverse students and their ability to develop personal strategies to manage their experiences of being part of a marginalised group. Strategies that participants identified as creating authentic inclusive tertiary environments related to visibility of diverse gender identities within policies, processes and curricula as well as educational programmes for staff on the unique needs of the diverse gender population.

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GLOSSARY

Agender	literally translated as ‘without gender’; it can also be used as a statement of no gender identity or gender neutrality.
akava’ine	a Cook Island Māori term for gender diverse identities
Cisgender	those who identify with the sex they were assigned at birth
diverse gender	an umbrella term for those who do not fit into the binary model of gender
diverse sexualities	an umbrella term for those who do not identify as heterosexual
fa’afafine	a Samoan person assigned male at birth who explicitly embodies both masculine and feminine gender traits
Fakaleiti	a Tongan person assigned male at birth who behaves in a relatively feminine manner
Gay	sexually attracted to people of one’s own sex/gender
gender	a set of socially prescribed roles and attributes relating to masculinity and femininity
gender normative	adhering to or reinforcing ideal standards of masculinity or femininity
Genderqueer	a person who identifies with neither, both, or a combination of male and female genders.
Heteronormativity	an assumption that heterosexuality is the only valid sexual orientation
Homophobia	dislike of or prejudice against homosexual people.
Intersex	a general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male.
Lesbian	a female homosexual: a female who experiences romantic love or sexual attraction to other females
male-to-female (M2F)	a person assigned male at birth who identifies as female
Māhū	a third gender person in some Polynesian cultures
Misgendered	being referred to by the incorrect pronoun
Microaggressions	brief, commonplace and often daily verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities
Queer	an umbrella term for people who are not heterosexual or not cisgender.
Sex	a term used to describe the biological body, usually assigned at birth. Two options are currently available in most contexts: male and female
Straight	heterosexual – a person who experiences romantic love or sexual attraction to people of the opposite sex/gender
Takatāpui	inclusive Māori term for those with diverse genders and sexualities
tangata ira tane	a Māori term describing someone born with a female body who has a masculine gender identity
Trans	an umbrella term for those who are transgender, transsexual or those who do not conform to the sex they were assigned at birth. Also includes those who feel neither male nor female, or experience their gender as fluid
Transgender	A person whose gender identity is different from their physical sex at birth
Transphobia	dislike of or prejudice against trans people
Transsexual	a person who has changed, or is in the process of changing, their physical sex to conform to their gender identity
vaka sa lewa lewa	a Fijian term for gender diverse identities
whakāwahine	a Māori term meaning to become a woman

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This study investigated the experiences of students with diverse gender identities within the New Zealand tertiary environment. The aim was to hear directly from participants about whether they had experienced discrimination in relation to their gender identities; what kinds of discrimination, if any, were occurring; and whether participants believed specific strategies might support an inclusive tertiary environment for diverse gender students. New Zealanders have become increasingly aware of the gender diverse community and New Zealand tertiary education providers are among the many communities seeking to create inclusive environments so all can find their place to belong within these institutions. It seemed timely to explore the experiences of diverse gender students as a way of supporting these conversations.

The diverse gender community is one group that is becoming increasingly visible; therefore, a growing awareness is developing about the issues members of this community face (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Gender diverse people do not fit into the binary model of gender. Gender diversity is inclusive of, but not limited to, people who are intersex, trans, transsexual, transgender, takatāpui, whakāwahine, tangata ira tane, fa'afafine, akava'ine, fakaleiti, mähū, vaka sa lewa lewa, fiafifine, and genderqueer. Regardless of their specific identification, they share the experience of challenging traditional gender norms and because of this, face high rates of discrimination and marginalisation (Case, Kanenberg, Erich, & Tittsworth, 2012).

As the visibility of gender diverse students is increasing, this study sought to identify whether the discrimination that is reported in the wider society is occurring within tertiary settings. As well as looking at discrimination, it also focused on what strategies might support an inclusive environment for gender diverse tertiary students.

RATIONALE

The New Zealand Youth '12 survey found that one in every 25 high school students either identify with a diverse gender identity or are questioning their gender identity (Clark et al., 2014). The survey showed that young diverse gender people face discrimination in their day-to-day lives that impacts on their wellbeing in many ways. Some of the ways this discrimination occurs are through increased levels of bullying, exclusion, and lack of access to health care. More than half of diverse gender high school students are afraid that someone at school will bully or hurt them, with 50% actually having experienced violence. The report from this survey also noted that these experiences follow students into tertiary study.

When looking at the experience of being part of a minority group it could be said that the underlying causes of this discrimination are misrepresentation and invisibility (Borstein, 1994). In recent years, those wishing to provide inclusive and accessible services to the gender diverse community have begun considering what changes need to occur that would increase the visibility and accurate representation of the diverse gender community. Currently, there is a lack of data relating to the diverse gender community, as it is rare for organisations to collect information relating to gender identities other than using the sex terms male or female. Statistics NZ acknowledges that not collecting data about gender diverse people supports the invisibility of this population, therefore increasing the prospects of discrimination (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). An investigation currently being undertaken by Statistics New Zealand explores possible new ways for governmental agencies to record a range of gender identities. Part of the rationale for this investigation is an acknowledgement that the New Zealand Human Rights Commission affirms increasing visibility as one way to promote equality. A report states that "Equality is affirmed by visibility, because it acknowledges a person's place in society. In New Zealand, the visibility of diverse sexual and gender minorities helps to prevent stereotyping and remove barriers to equal participation. Visibility is a particular issue for sexual and gender minorities in relation to data collection" (Human Rights Commission, 2010. p 313). When changes are made to how gender identities are recorded at a governmental level, it will become easier for tertiary providers to begin collecting data on the gender diverse population within their institutions. This data collection would increase the visibility of this population and offer education providers access to information about the experiences of diverse gender students.

Tertiary providers are beginning to publicly acknowledge diverse gender people as a population that has unique needs and experiences significant barriers to success within these institutions. For example, at the beginning of 2014 Unitec Institute of Technology New Zealand created a transgender scholarship fund (Unitec Institute of Technology, 2014). These scholarships provide financial support and advocacy within the institution in recognition of the challenges relating to accessing healthcare, changing legal documentation, and providing appropriate services for staff. The creation of a fund that can be accessed recognises that one of the challenges gender diverse students often face is additional financial costs, for example, for specialist medical support and fees for changing legal documents (Human Rights Commission, 2008). At the end of 2014, the University of Auckland also created a fund specifically to cover the costs of new documentation for students wishing to have new birth certificates and other forms of identification that match their gender identities (Auckland University, 2015). In the context of tertiary institutions increasingly promoting themselves as being inclusive of diversity in its many forms (Cegler, 2012), these types of initiatives contribute to the increasing visibility of diverse gender students.

In addition to the internal initiatives that are occurring within tertiary institutions to support diverse gender students, one can also find an increasing number of initiatives to provide education for those seeking to create inclusive environments. In 2012 Unitec launched the ALLY network, an initiative that provides workshops for queer and straight staff and students to challenge heteronormativity and gender normativity within the institution (Unitec Institute of Technology, 2012). In 2015 AUT University joined the Rainbow Tick programme in recognition of the institution's level of support of diverse sexualities and genders (AUT University, 2015). The Rainbow Tick certification programme was launched in 2014 to assess workplaces' level of support for gender and sexual diversity (Rainbow Tick, 2014). Also, in 2016, InsideOUT, a youth-led national organisation which works with youth and a wide range of service providers to educate about inclusive practice for young people of diverse sexualities, sexes and genders, created an educational resource for teachers and youth workers called Inside Out (InsideOUT, 2016). This resource provides information and activities for creating environments that are inclusive for those with diverse gender identities. The international medical community is also seeking to provide education and resources to support inclusive practices. The Lancet recently published a series called *Transgender Health* in an attempt to increase the availability of information about, and reduce the stigma associated with, diverse gender people (The Lancet, 2016). These initiatives are evidence of the range of conversations

that are currently occurring in relation to the inclusion of diverse gender identities in the education sector.

My motivation for conducting this study was fuelled by this increased awareness within my own workplace. As an academic staff member in a New Zealand tertiary institution, I am committed to ensuring all students have access to education that meets their individual needs. I believe that in order for students to succeed in their chosen academic pathways they first need to “have a place to stand”. The teaching and learning environment needs to be one in which students can relax and know that they are welcomed and recognised. This commitment to inclusive teaching and learning environments led me to be part of the founding group of Unitec’s Ally Network (Unitec Institute of Technology, 2012). As a facilitator of Unitec’s Ally Network, my focus is to support staff and students to build an environment that includes those with diverse sexualities and genders. Part of this process is running day-long workshops where staff and students gather for conversations that challenge heteronormativity and gender norms. During these workshops, I became aware that although as a lesbian I have considerable lived experience relating to diverse sexualities, I have very limited experiences with regard to the diverse gender community. As a ciswoman, my gender identity matches the sex I was assigned at birth, and I, therefore, do not have personal experience to draw upon when facilitating the diverse gender aspects of the workshop. As I sought to increase my knowledge and confidence in facilitating conversations related to diverse gender people, I became interested in the specific experiences of these students in tertiary education.

Numerous studies and reports demonstrate the discrimination and marginalisation gender diverse students face around the world (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Burdge, 2007; Case et al., 2012; Cegler, 2012; Clark et al., 2014; Courvant, 2011; Effrig, Bieschke, & Locke, 2011; Otago University Students Association, 2003; Rands, 2009; Rankin & Beemyn, 2012). However, I discovered that no studies had solely focused on the experiences of gender diverse students in tertiary education in New Zealand or Australia. This study seeks to investigate whether New Zealand tertiary students experience discrimination and how inclusive tertiary environments are created for this specific population.

AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As this study sought to understand the experiences of diverse gender tertiary students, it was important to ensure that the voices of these students were central to the research. The project was designed to actively engage with diverse gender students and hear stories about their experiences in tertiary education. The focus was specifically on their experiences of how their gender identities impacted on their experiences in a tertiary setting.

The following objectives and research questions framed the content of this study:

RESEARCH AIMS

1. To critically examine whether gender diverse students experience discrimination related to their gender identities within tertiary settings and, if so, to identify the ways in which this happens.
2. To explore the strategies that support the inclusion of gender diverse students within tertiary settings.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Do gender diverse students experience discrimination relating to their gender identities within tertiary settings? If so, how does this discrimination occur?
2. What strategies support the inclusion of gender diverse students within tertiary settings?

DATA COLLECTION

Seven participants were selected for this study using a purposeful sampling method. Research notices were posted on relevant social media sites and emailed out through diverse gender networks. Respondents self-identified as gender diverse and volunteered to be part of the study in response to the notices that were circulated. Interviews were semi-structured, and an interview schedule was distributed prior to a given interview taking place. Participants also agreed to be contacted on three occasions after the interviews – firstly, to review the interview transcript, then to comment on the general themes that were identified from the thematic analysis of the data, and finally to comment on the pseudonym that was going to be used in the public arena. On each occasion, the response rate was high, with the majority of participants actively contributing to all three stages.

ORGANISATION OF THIS THESIS

Chapter one has presented the rationale for this study and has outlined the aims, objectives, and research questions that frame this thesis. Chapter two presents a detailed summary of the literature. It includes the three main themes that were identified relating to the research aims and questions. Chapter three provides a rationale and justification for choosing a qualitative methodology for data collection and a thematic analysis of the data. It describes the methodology used for the semi-structured interviews, including the use of a consultation group and the data sampling methods. Chapter four details the findings relating to the discrimination participants experienced and the strategies that were identified to address discrimination, both at personal and institutional levels. Chapter five discusses the findings detailed in chapter four, using the research questions to frame the discussion. Recommendations and suggestions for future study are provided to support inclusive tertiary environments.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This study sought to explore and understand the experiences of New Zealand diverse gender students in tertiary education. As this area of research is an emerging one, only a limited number of studies are available within the New Zealand context. Therefore, this review will include international literature to establish a clear framework for this research project. A number of overseas studies include diverse gender identities along with diverse sexualities when looking at the experience of tertiary students (Renn, 2007; Skene, Hogan, de Vries, & Goody, 2008; Valentine, Wood, & Plummer, 2009). In addition, two studies in New Zealand cover the experiences of diverse gender tertiary students (Riches, 2011; Woods, 2013). However, all of these studies tend to focus more on the experiences of students with diverse sexual identities.

Several overseas studies report specifically on the experiences of diverse gender tertiary students (Case et al., 2012 & Tittsworth, 2012; Effrig et al., 2011 2011; Rankin & Beemyn, 2012). This study is the first in New Zealand to focus solely on the experiences of diverse gender students in a tertiary setting. Although, at the time of writing, there are no New Zealand-specific studies that have focused solely on tertiary environments, a New Zealand report has been published identifying the discrimination faced by diverse gender people in all areas of society (Human Rights Commission, 2008). A study of the health and wellbeing of diverse gender students in New Zealand high schools has also been published (Clark et al., 2014). The themes from both these studies align with the international literature and will be covered in more detail later in this chapter.

Several significant themes emerged from the literature. These themes include the power of gender normativity, and how diverse gender students challenge these norms; the discrimination that occurs when social norms are not adhered to; and the strategies that have been developed by gender diverse people and their allies to navigate the challenges they face as a minority group. These themes will form the structure of this literature review.

GENDER NORMATIVITY

Gender norms

The first step in a discussion of gender norms is to define what is meant by the term 'gender'. It is useful first to clarify the distinction between sex and gender. Sex is a term used to describe the biological body and is usually assigned at birth. Two main options are currently available: male and female. Gender, however, is a set of socially prescribed roles and attributes. Boys and girls are raised within a given culture to take on certain behaviours and functions within society. So by the time we are adults, we have developed social roles and are expected to identify as either a man or a woman. Fryer (2012) states that the "social roles taken on by men and woman are not rooted in biology but are, rather, products of socialization" (p 41).

From this perspective, we can see that gender is a lived category of experience in the world. It is sometimes said that gender is performed through a series of rituals that are socially constructed. Butler (2011) took this idea further and named this formative process "gender performativity" and states that "acts, gestures and a desire to produce the effect of an internal core or substance...are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means" (p 185). In other words, it is more than a performance, an act that we can start and stop. Performativity implies that how we act creates a series of effects. As we move through life the ways in which we act, talk, and walk create an impression for others about whether we are men or women. Fryer (2012) further expanded on this idea by noting that our acts do not define our gender; instead, our acts are how we express our gender, which again is defined in a broader context. Butler and Fryer agree that through our behaviours and actions we bring our gender to life in a way that others can observe.

Now that gender has been defined as a social construct we can start to explore how gender norms are maintained. Rands (2009) describes gender as a "system of power relations with privileges and punishments" (p. 420). This description indicates that gender norms are not only socially constructed, but also kept in place by rewarding those who conform and punishing those who deviate from the norms. Stereotypes exist within Western society in the ways men are expected to conform to masculine behaviours, for example to be rational, goal orientated, and decisive; whereas women are expected to conform to feminine behaviours, for example

to be empathic, relational, and nurturing. Sometimes people who do not conform to these stereotypes are seen as odd and unnatural by others around them (Muhr & Sullivan, 2013). This negative attention is an example of how people are punished for not conforming to the gender norms.

There is a broad body of literature relating to the social construction of gender, however often an underpinning assumption is that of a binary model of sex and gender. Fryer (2012) asserts that “even within the arguments about whether gender is an ‘internal essence’ and ‘outer category’ the assumption is still that there is male and there is female. (p. 41). The idea that only two natural biological states exist – male and female – has been a dominant discourse within Western culture for many years. In recent times, however, an extensive body of literature has emerged to challenge the sex/gender binary. As researchers have investigated diverse genders, it has become necessary to develop a new model of gender to replace the problematic binary system rooted in a male/female dichotomy. A triadic model that defines sex, gender identity and gender attributes has emerged to open up new possibilities for defining gender and challenging the current societal norms (Fryer, 2012). This model is in line with Butler’s analysis of gender, but further defines the expression of gender as its own component. It recognises that there are three aspects to our gender: 1) Sex, our biological makeup; 2) Gender identity, how we see ourselves and how we feel about our gender; and 3) Gender expression, our behaviours and how we act in the world.

Further to this triadic model, recent research has explored the idea of gender being linked to a continuum of sex expression. Fausto-Sterling (2016) reported findings of a research project that explored alternative ways of studying biological sex in a way that moves past the binary model of sex from a biological perspective. She argues that “behaviours and biology are different manifestations of the same complex system that includes infant and adult caregivers” (p 13). This acknowledgement that gender embodiment/performance is a combination of biology, behaviours and how others treat us is helpful as we start to explore the many different gender identities in existence.

Diverse gender identities

As previously mentioned gender normativity is a socially constructed phenomenon that supports the binary model of male/masculine identity and female/feminine identity, with particular behaviours assigned to both identities (Burdge, 2007). Gender diverse people do not fit into the binary model of gender. They may identify as transgender, intersex, gender fluid, gender queer or in other ways. In one American study of gender diverse students, over 100 different gender identities were discovered among the participants (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Regardless of their specific identification, they share the experience of challenging traditional gender norms (Case et al., 2012).

The gender diverse community has created its own language to support the communication of its reality, as many minority communities do. This language is ever evolving and can be challenging for those seeking a fixed definition or description. Burdge (2007) notes that the diverse gender community “has generated a unique language with which to communicate its reality. This language is somewhat fluid and continually evolving” (p 243). Burdge suggests that being able to accept the fluidity of the language is arguably linked to the ability to be able to accept the fluidity of gender. The need for certainty and fixed meanings about many different aspects of life is often noted as a barrier for the experience of connection (Brown, 2015). It may be that being willing to be uncertain will help those who seek to understand the lives of diverse gender people.

There are academic theories that support this move towards a less fixed way of approaching gender. Queer theory recognises the gender binary as socially constructed and gender as performative and fluid (Kaufmann, 2010). This theory will be explored more in the methodology section, but it is worth noting here that counter-narratives are available for diverse gender studies. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is also a theory that challenges power structures within society. Although CRT focuses on racism and how it is engrained in society, it has some useful perspectives that can be applied when challenging gender norms. For this reason, some researchers refer to this theory as a way of challenging gender norms within education (North, 2010). North encourages us to look for unspoken messages of deviance from gender norms as a way to notice the many different experiences of gender that exist. To be labelled as a “deviant” is one way that society excludes members who are not conforming. This exclusion can lead to marginalised groups creating their own labels that empower them.

As gender diverse students become more visible within the tertiary setting, studies have started to describe how diverse gender people identify themselves. A large American study (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011) identified milestones that were common for people with different gender identities as they navigated the process of recognising and accepting their identities. These milestones include feelings about gender difference from a young age; some form of repression or shame; educating themselves about gender diversity; overcoming denial and/or shame; and coming to a place of acceptance. Of particular relevance to tertiary education, this study found that under 20s identifying as gender diverse have more connections to resources and are more aware of their needs than those of previous generations. Younger diverse gender people still go through the discrimination, harassment, and assaults of previous generations; however, the study found what seemed to be a reduction in the period of denial and concealment compared to that of previous generations. These milestones or stages are useful to consider when examining forms of discrimination diverse gender tertiary students may face.

DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination in relation to diverse gender identities

Discrimination towards gender diverse people occurs when the majority consciously or unconsciously holds an idea of gender normativity and unfairly treats those who do not adhere to society's gender norms compared with those who do conform (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Efrigg et al., 2011; Human Rights Commission, 2008). Research on discrimination in this area generally explores attitudes about gender and beliefs connected to appropriate social behaviour. Burdge (2007) states that it is the non-conforming aspect of socially imposed gender roles that attracts discrimination from the dominant group, and this is what puts gender diverse people at risk.

Types of discrimination include but are not limited to harassment, abuse, and rejection by members of society. Often this treatment is justified by the belief that diverse gender individuals are unusual and deviate from the rules of nature; that is, they are seen as unnatural (Muhr & Sullivan, 2013). Many studies provide evidence of the marginalisation and abuse of gender diverse people in all areas of society (Case et al., 2012; Clark et al., 2014; Efrigg et al.,

2011; Human Rights Commission, 2008; Rankin & Beemyn, 2012; Rossiter, 2014). Generally, this discriminatory behaviour from the majority could be described as diverse gender people receiving negative attention for behaving in ways that are considered inappropriate for their presumed gender in terms of clothing, manner of speech, bathroom use and so on (Rands, 2009). Other times marginalisation can occur because diverse gender people are misunderstood, overlooked, or invalidated, again for not behaving in line with society's norms (Burdge, 2007). As well as individual discrimination, there are also many examples of institutional discrimination. Diverse gender tertiary students often do not have access to appropriate housing, bathrooms, health centres, and administration systems (Clark et al., 2014; Human Rights Commission, 2008; Muhr & Sullivan, 2013).

When a group of people is discriminated against there is also a group of people who are privileged (Rands, 2009). In this context the term 'gender conforming privilege' is used for this phenomenon. Those who do conform to society's norms and expectations about masculine and feminine behaviours are accepted, viewed as belonging, and can navigate social environments without the punishments those who do not conform experience. Rands (2009) created a framework to help explain the complexities of gender conforming privilege and oppression. It describes two forms of oppression that are connected: gender category oppression and gender transgression oppression. Gender category oppression is described as oppression based on the gender a person is perceived to be by others. This form of oppression has been called sexism in the past. Earlier gender studies focused on sexist or misogynistic attitudes betraying an underlying assumption that men are better than women. Rands refers to sexism as gender transgression in order to include more than the traditional male and female genders and as such addresses the many different layers of oppression that occur for diverse gender people. Gender category oppression relates to discrimination that occurs due to the perceived gender of a person, however gender transgression oppression recognises that people who do not conform to gender norms are also discriminated against. Gender transgression describes a behaviour or act that contradicts societal norms, for example, using a bathroom that others assume does not match the gender they perceive a person to be or wearing clothes that others perceive do not match the sex a person was assigned at birth. Rands' gender oppression matrix shows the intersectionality between gender category oppression and gender transgression oppression. The gender oppression matrix is presented as a model to assist educators and researchers to explain the complexities of gender oppression and therefore unpack the many forms of gender conforming privilege.

While creating a clear definition of the discriminations diverse gender people face can be a complex task, it is clear that current western societal attitudes often create unsafe environments for diverse gender people (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). However, although societal discrimination occurs at all levels of interaction, it is often invisible to the majority. Gender-conforming people are generally unaware of this discrimination until confronted by the experiences of gender diverse people. If the majority remain unaware of what is happening and do not examine the belief system that imposes these values, then the punishment of those who do not conform will continue (Muhr & Sullivan, 2013). The present study aims to share the stories of diverse gender tertiary students and increase awareness of gender diversity and some of its implications within the gender conforming population.

Invisible exclusion

The lack of awareness amongst the gender conforming population about the challenges diverse gender people face can create a level of invisibility that leads to exclusion. Two of the main issues that gender diverse people face are invisibility and misrepresentation (Borstein, 1994). Despite the growing number of people publicly identifying as being outside the gender binary, some believe too little attention is paid to making changes to address such invisibility and marginalisation (Effrig et al., 2011). This study seeks to explore whether this invisible exclusion and marginalisation are occurring within the New Zealand tertiary environment.

The literature indicates many different reasons why this invisibility exists. Language can exclude diverse gender people. For example, when speaking about body parts, if they are described as 'women's' parts or 'men's' parts someone in the room who identifies as a woman and has a penis could feel excluded (Spade, 2011). This gendering of body parts can be avoided by simply using the biological names for body parts. There are many different aspects of our language which are gender-based and reinforces binary gender norms. Another example of how language can exclude people appears within administration systems which record only binary gender options (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Spade, 2011). When an application form asks for your gender but only offers male or female, not only are sex and gender conflated, but also anyone outside the gender binary is both automatically invisible and receives the message they do not belong.

Even when these data collection points do offer a variety of gender options, it can still be difficult to collect accurate data as people with diverse gender identities often experience discrimination that makes it difficult for them to disclose their identities for fear of reprisal (Rands, 2009). This problem can make it hard to track diverse gender students. Another barrier for gender diverse people is the difficulty often experienced by students desiring a change of name or sex on academic records (Human Rights Commission, 2008). Sometimes this problem occurs simply because the relevant staff are unsure of the process; at other times it can be that there are no systems in place to allow these changes to occur. Again when systems and staff are not set up to include them, the unspoken message diverse gender students receive is 'you are not important'.

In addition to language and systemic barriers within the tertiary environment, there are also challenges in accessing gender-neutral bathrooms and housing. Beemyn and Rankin (2011) report that 'although these students have unique needs related to programming, housing, bathrooms and locker rooms... most colleges and universities do offer little or no support for this growing population' (p 72). As mentioned previously, gender conforming people have the privilege of never needing to worry about entering a toilet and being challenged on their right to be there because of others' perceptions of where they belong. This lack of suitable facilities can create a lot of stress for gender diverse students as they are then required to create strategies for addressing the lack of facilities to accommodate these basic human needs. The *To Be Who I Am* report also recorded the difficulties gender diverse people have accessing appropriate healthcare (Human Rights Commission, 2008). The report stated that "the inquiry found significant gaps and inconsistencies in the provision of health services" (p 4). These are all examples of overt barriers that diverse gender student face, but there are also barriers that are more covert.

Some covert methods of exclusion can be found in people's attitudes. For example, a staff member overseeing the assessment of applications for admission into undergraduate and post-graduate programmes could perceive that a gender diverse person who is planning to transition from one sex/gender to another will experience difficulties and therefore is not a good candidate for a given programme. The *To Be Who I Am* report notes that 'the inquiry was

provided with details of trans people's difficulties gaining selection for undergraduate and postgraduate courses because of concerns they might not fit in or find the course difficult because they were transitioning" (p. 31). This kind of discrimination is often hard to prove as generally other reasons will be given without an acknowledgement of the real concerns. Another example of how attitudes can create exclusion would be a staff member who is aware that gender diversity exists, but because of a lack of training they see gender diverse students as different, or the 'other', and therefore in need of special treatment (Spade, 2011). This 'helper' attitude further marginalises the diverse gender population instead of supporting it. Such well-meaning but unhelpful attitudes can hamper the addressing of misunderstandings and result in gender diverse students remaining silent. If there is not also a conversation in the educational environment about power dynamics and how the invisible group can be heard, then the dominant voice can silence conversations in which a counter-narrative could be presented (Courvant, 2011). In other words, those in the majority groups have more influence and ability to create environments that meet their needs. It is challenging to be a lone voice within a group whose members are unaware of how they impact on you.

In addition to barriers that exist through language, system, and attitudes there is also a lack of content that includes diverse gender people within the courses and programmes in which students are participating. Many students report a lack of content relevant to diverse gender identities (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Rands, 2009), making it challenging for diverse gender students to see themselves reflected in curricula. Teachers have the responsibility to support the growth and success of all their students, therefore this area appears to be one requiring focus. Not only is curriculum content that reflects the lives of the diverse gender community lacking, there is also a lack of research about gender diverse experiences which could inform such content.

Often when research does occur diverse gender participants are included with those reporting minority sexual identities such as lesbian, gay and bisexual participants to create one 'diverse gender and sexualities' group (Rands, 2009). In addition to this lack of specific research, few tertiary institutions have created policies and practices that specifically address the needs of diverse gender students. (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Even in those institutions that do have such policies in place, education for the staff to support the implementation of such policies is

often lacking (North, 2010). These areas will be discussed below when addressing inclusive strategies.

Microaggressions

One form of individual discrimination gender diverse tertiary students experience is at the level of microaggressions. Microaggression is a term to describe small but regular insults, dismissals, and general hostility experienced by racial minorities. Recently it has also been used to describe the negative experiences of diverse gender people. Microaggressions describe the kinds of comments and experiences that, on their own, do not create significant harm, but when repeatedly experienced can cause stress and anxiety.

The secondary school environment appears to play a part in setting up expectations or perceptions of how diverse gender students will experience tertiary education (Woods, 2013). Diverse gender students report a range of small but cumulative negative interactions that contribute to an experience of stress. New Zealand diverse gender high school students reported receiving negative comments from both other students and staff when they used bathrooms that others felt did not match their gender (Human Rights Commission, 2008). These kinds of experiences can create anxiety about basic bodily functions that gender conforming people rarely have to experience. There are also examples of staff who have failed to intervene when other students have made hurtful comments (Rands, 2009). These experiences can leave the diverse gender student feeling unable to speak up about how they feel in this situation, which can be exacerbated if the staff member themselves makes prejudicial comments. There are varying degrees of inappropriate comments, from those unintentionally making hurtful comments to those intentionally harassing and bullying students. Many students will simply stop attending class to avoid these experiences in the future (Human Rights Commission, 2008). It is not surprising that students with these experiences arrive in tertiary education on high alert and fearful that these experiences will recur. Diverse gender tertiary students experience these microaggressions in all aspects of their day-to-day interactions on campus, whether it be within the curriculum content and delivery, when seeking career advice and health services, or simply socialising between classes (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011).

All of these microaggressions occur when the majority remain ignorant about the needs of the diverse gender population, and enable both overt and unintentional discrimination to continue (Rankin & Beemyn, 2012). This form of exclusion and marginalisation creates levels of stress in people constantly exposed over long periods.

Minority stress

Minority stress is a theory that was developed to explain the experiences of racially marginalised groups. Meyer (2003) also started applying the theory to people of diverse sexualities and when examining their health outcomes. It is being utilised in the present study in relation to the experiences of the diverse gender community, and is valuable when looking at academic outcomes. Minority stress is a recognised response when a person's values are in a state of conflict with those of the dominant culture. It stems from experiencing discrimination, concealment, and expectation of rejection (Dispenza, Brown, & Chastain, 2016).

Meyer (2003) explained that minority stress theory distinguishes between internal and external stressors. External stress processes can be caused by exposure to prejudice, for example rejection, discrimination, and violence. In other words, external stressors occur in response to others' behaviour. Internal stress processes are created by long-term exposure to these kinds of prejudice. These internal stressors are separated into three distinct processes. The first process involves internalised negative messages about one's own marginalised identity. Those constantly exposed to societal messages that there is something wrong with them usually start to believe this about themselves. The second internal stressor is a belief that those who do not fit into society's norms will be rejected. This idea leads to some diverse gender people believing that once others find out about their gender identity they will be excluded and shamed. These two internal stressors then lead to the third, a desire to conceal part of oneself. In other words, to hide one's gender identity (Balsam, 2013; Lea, Wit, & Reynolds, 2014 2014; Rands, 2009). Minority stress theory demonstrates how a person dealing with an invisible stigmatised identity may seek to avoid discrimination or prejudice by hiding aspects of themselves that are considered to be outside the norm. These feelings relate to the second milestone of repression and shame that Beemyn and Rankin (2011) discuss as diverse gender people come to terms with their gender identities. These elevated levels of stress can have a serious impact not only on health outcomes but on all aspects of life.

Studies have shown that diverse gender tertiary students are found to have elevated rates of distress compared with their gender-conforming, or cisgender, counterparts (Effrig et al., 2011; Human Rights Commission, 2008). Cisgender is a term used to describe a person whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth. A New Zealand survey reported on the health and wellbeing of high school students and found that although the diverse gender group was numerically small (around 5% of students) they faced significant wellbeing disparities compared with their cisgender counterparts. Some of these included lower confidence levels, higher depression and suicide rates, experiences of bullying, and lower rates of perceiving that a parent cares for them (Clark et al., 2014).

These New Zealand findings are in line with similar overseas reports. Burdge (2007) notes that one of the impacts of discrimination and microaggressions on diverse gender people is the development of unhealthy behaviours in order to cope with confusion, depression, and low self-esteem. Some of these behaviours include suicide attempts, committing crime, and antisocial behaviour. Without understanding minority stress, these behaviours are often treated in isolation without considering the underlying causes (Burdge, 2007).

While these unhealthy behaviours can be linked to attempts to manage increased anxiety levels, diverse gender people also develop healthy coping skills. Some of these skills include problem-solving, reframing, relaxation, identifying support systems, and maximising personal strengths (Dispenza et al., 2016). This skill development can be connected to the final milestone diverse gender people experience as they educate themselves and overcome their shame and denial on the way to self-acceptance (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). The present study will document the strategies diverse gender students have developed that promote resilience and successful tertiary study.

STRATEGIES

Physical environment

Previous studies have suggested many strategies that support inclusive environments for gender diverse students. When considering the different strategies, Maslow's Hierarchy of

Needs provides a useful structure for considering the different human needs each strategy addressed. The Maslow model suggests a hierarchy of needs human beings require in order to grow and become self-actualised (Maslow, 1943). The first level of needs is physiological and includes sleep, shelter, food, and water. Once these basic needs are met, safety and security requirements need to be addressed. After these basic human needs are met then the model suggests a person can experience belonging, increased self-esteem, and finally self-actualisation. As tertiary education is a vehicle for people to realise their potential and create meaningful lives this model provides a suitable framework for reviewing the different strategies presented in the literature.

When considering the various strategies suggested, focusing on the physical environment including appropriate access to bathrooms, housing, and healthcare consistently appear as priority areas (Case et al., 2012; Clark et al., 2014; Effrig et al., 2011; Human Rights Commission, 2008; Otago University Students Association, 2003; Rankin & Beemyn, 2012). These areas fit with the physiological and safety needs from the Maslow model. Woods (2013) noted that for tertiary students to be able to fully interact and engage in teaching and learning environments they first needed to feel safe from harm and emotionally respected by their peers and academic staff.

By creating a physical environment in which students can use a bathroom without fear, have access both to living environments that are safe from harassment and to healthcare providers who are knowledgeable about the unique needs of gender diverse people, tertiary providers are removing the first level of barriers to diverse gender students' inclusion and engagement (Effrig et al., 2011; Rankin & Beemyn, 2012).

Along with discussing the physiological needs of gender diverse students, the literature also points to the overt inclusion of diverse gender identities within the policies and practices of tertiary institutes (Case et al., 2012; Cegler, 2012; Effrig et al., 2011; Rankin & Beemyn, 2012; Skene et al., 2008). Most tertiary providers have anti-harassment policies; however, few directly mention gender identity and expression. This omission leaves the 'sex' category within such policies open to interpretation and adds to the invisibility of this group of students.

Returning to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs we can see that once safety and security have been addressed the next need to be met is one of belonging. All human beings seek places where they feel accepted and can experience a connection with others (Maslow, 1943). When looking at the lives of diverse gender young people, studies have noted these students are often arriving at institutions with an expectation of being excluded because of their experiences in high school and of wider societal attitudes in general (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Clark et al., 2014). Students may, therefore, arrive at tertiary institutes looking for a place to belong, for a sense of community (Woods, 2013). Ways to provide a sense of connection with others, whether in a physical 'rainbow space' or through social connections via groups and activities, is suggested to assist in addressing the need for acceptance and belonging (Case et al., 2012; Cegler, 2012; Efrig et al., 2011; Rankin & Beemyn, 2012; Skene et al., 2008; Woods, 2013).

Ability to self-identify

The fourth level in Maslow's Hierarchy is self-esteem: the confidence to be a unique individual who feels accepted and is able to achieve (Maslow, 1943). A common theme in the literature that fits well with this human need is the desire to confidently disclose a diverse gender identity and feel accepted and respected. As previously mentioned, in one American study, when people were given the option to self-identify, over 100 different identities emerged (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). This wide range of identities indicates the complexity tertiary institutions are facing when they seek ways to include the diverse gender community.

Not only are there a wide range of potential identities; as has been noted previously, gender fluidity means that people can change how they identify over time. In addition, different people navigate gender differently (North, 2010). Those tertiary providers who are working through these administrative challenges to create policies and systems that are inclusive send a message to the diverse gender community that they matter and that their needs are important. Burdge (2007) states that "it is empowering for oppressed groups to control the language representing them" (p. 244). A key strategy for supporting gender diverse students is to create processes in which they can choose appropriate words to describe their gender identities.

Awareness of diversity and challenging gender norms

A theme that recurs in the literature is the importance of staff within tertiary environments who are aware of society's gender norms and who actively promote inclusive practices. It is recognised that even when changes are made to physical environments, policies, and practices, if the people within the tertiary institutes are unaware of gender conforming privilege and its impact on the diverse gender community the required culture shift will not occur (Rankin & Beemyn, 2012). Positive attitudes of other students and staff are vital for creating safe, welcoming spaces for diverse gender students.

One study found the most effective practice was to first educate the majority about best practice, legal terminology, the diverse gender umbrella, and institutional obligations linked to social justice (Case et al., 2012). This approach recognises the power dynamics required to keep societal gender norms in place. Cegler (2012) also supports suggestions that a genuine commitment to an inclusive and supportive environment is needed and suggests that "professionals in higher education must be mindful of their actions and actively engage best practice in both admissions and student services" (p 22). Effective education is seen as a strategy to build this commitment to inclusive environments.

Rands (2009) suggests that education focused on increasing awareness and creating social change needs to acknowledge "gender is a system of power relations that include rules with privileges and punishments" (p. 420). Gender-sensitive education seeks to challenge societal power dynamics and acknowledge how diverse gender people are oppressed (Rands, 2009). The gender oppression matrix, mentioned earlier, was designed to assist these complex conversations. North (2010) suggested that facilitating these conversations requires caution, humility, and consideration to ensure that participants leave the session clear about the strength and resilience of gender diverse people as opposed to being a group that needs saving.

Education focused on the idea of learning about marginalised people in order to support diversity has been identified as problematic and is sometimes called the "diversity pedagogy" (Courvant, 2011. p 26). This method of teaching often focuses on the benefit of including marginalised people, rather than focusing on ending discrimination. When educational

sessions focus solely on teaching the majority about the marginalised group there is unlikely to be any lasting systemic change. This focus on power dynamics can provide a clear direction for action when seeking to address the impact of gender norms. North (2010) also warns of the possibility that discussions about human difference can create increased marginalisation if the teaching pedagogy is not examined to ensure inclusive attitudes and language are present.

Linking into the educational strategy, gender-inclusive language is also noted in the literature as a way of increasing awareness about diversity and gender norms (Burdge, 2007; Burford, Lucassen, Penniket, & Hamilton, 2013; Case et al., 2012; Macdonald, 2011). Burdge (2007) suggests that those wishing to create inclusive environments need to use inclusive language and challenge others when they use gender stereotypes. Burdge proposes that this is a way of educating others and creating alliances. This strategy points to education occurring not only in the classroom, but also through individual actions in all areas of people's lives.

SUMMARY

In summary, the main themes that emerged from the literature review for this study demonstrate how societal gender norms often privilege the majority who conform, and create discrimination and stress for those who do not conform. This acknowledgement of the negative impact of gender norms on diverse gender people provides a rationale for seeking the experiences of tertiary students in New Zealand. This study sought to address the current lack of research into the experiences of diverse gender tertiary students in New Zealand.

In addition to gender norms and discrimination, the literature also identified strategies that those working towards inclusive environments have found helpful, such as a safe physical environment, the ability to self-identify with confidence and staff who are aware of the unique needs of diverse gender students. This study sought to identify what New Zealand diverse gender tertiary students see as appropriate inclusive strategies within the tertiary environment.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

OVERVIEW

This chapter provides a rationale and justification for this study's qualitative methods and methodology. It describes the processes used for the semi-structured interviews, explains the project's data management strategies, and details the thematic analysis of the data that was undertaken. The rationale for using a snowball sampling method is outlined and the ethical issues and limitations that were considered as part of the research design are discussed.

RESEARCH DESIGN

A subjectivist epistemology was chosen, as the research questions required me to collect the experiences and perceptions of diverse gender students in the tertiary education sector. A subjectivist approach assumes that different people perceive the world in different ways and construct their own social realities. The main focus of this approach is to understand the way each participant interprets their world and experiences (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). However, individual views do not exist in a social vacuum, so I chose to work within an interpretivist paradigm.

An interpretivist approach acknowledges that while individuals construct their own meanings for various experiences, these meanings cannot be separated from the social environment of which they are a part (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). An interpretivist paradigm, therefore, provided a framework to contextualise the meanings that participants created from their experiences as tertiary students. The literature review provided some insight into the social context that the participants live within, and the interpretivist framework meant it was possible to reflect on those insights as I analysed the data. In addition to recognising that the social environment influences research participants, the interpretivist paradigm also provided me with the ability to investigate not only the different parts of the tertiary environments students experience but also how those parts interact with each other (Cohen et al., 2007). These links will be explored more during the discussion of the study findings.

The interpretivist paradigm links closely with the ontology of constructivism. Constructivism allows researchers both to acknowledge individuals' created realities (mentioned previously), and to recognise the existence of multiple perspectives that are all valid (Rodwell, 1998). Expanding on these multiple constructed realities, social constructivism recognises that we construct our knowledge against a backdrop of normative sociocultural understandings, practices, and language (Schwandt, 2000). This study aims to represent the multiple voices of participants in a way that reflects simultaneously their authenticity and social situations, while still acknowledging there are many other voices that have not been heard.

Qualitative interpretivist research focuses on identifying, documenting and knowing (through interpretation) world views, values, meanings, beliefs, and thoughts, as well as the general characteristics of life events, circumstances, and specific additional phenomena under investigation (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). Therefore, throughout the study, I took into consideration that each participant would experience different social processes leading them to interpret their environment differently (Fryer, 2012; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). In order to understand the social processes these students experience, I needed to recognise that each participant interprets their environment differently and then responds in a range of ways.

Using a qualitative approach to method selection meant that semi-structured interviews could be undertaken to create the space for a dialogue between me (the researcher) and the participants. The interview transcripts could then be analysed for meaning and themes. I developed open-ended questions for the interviews to ensure enough flexibility to include everyone's experiences and perceptions. More detail about the justification and design of the interviews will be covered later in this chapter.

As I considered the structure of this study and how I wanted to interact with participants, I reflected on how diverse gender people, as a minority group, are often marginalised in society as they do not conform to current gender norms. It was, therefore, important for me to find ways to ensure that dominant social norms were not inadvertently applied to the study as I investigated whether and in what specific ways, according to participants, this discrimination was occurring in the tertiary setting. Therefore, queer theory was also woven through the research design, further developing the study's social constructivist framework.

Queer theory was developed in the 1990s because researchers engaged in gender and queer studies were seeking ways to challenge socially constructed concepts of gender (Allen, 2010; Fryer, 2012; Gamson, 2000). Queer theorists seek to understand what is considered “normal” and who is excluded and oppressed in relation to diverse genders and sexualities. There were several points during the research design that I considered how queer theory could be applied.

I considered how to challenge normative gender language in all forms of communication throughout the study and worked to ensure my language and behaviour would be inclusive. This meant that the wording on the research Information Sheet (Appendix A) was carefully chosen, as was the language used for the interview questions. The data analysis process also acknowledged the power dynamics that can occur when members of a marginalised group participate in research. By weaving queer theory throughout this study my aim was to create processes where previously silenced voices of the diverse gender community could be heard (Gamson, 2000). I received significant support in this area from the consultation group that was formed for this study. More detail about the consultation group, and how I worked with them, appears later in this chapter.

SAMPLING

As this study sought to discover, understand, and gain insights into the lives of gender diverse tertiary students, purposeful sampling was chosen as an appropriate sampling method. Purposeful sampling works with the assumption that a researcher wishes to select specific participants in a way that ensures a rich source of information is available (Merriam, 2014). To select appropriate participants from the wider New Zealander population, a clear set of criteria was required.

Participant criteria

For this study, it was decided that participants would be people over the age of 16 who self-identify with a gender diverse identity. In addition, they needed to have studied within the New Zealand tertiary sector in the past 5 years and be willing to share their views about whether their gender identity impacted their study experience.

Snowballing sampling method

A snowball sampling method was chosen to find appropriate participants. The snowball method starts with a few people to interview and as interviews occur the participants pass on the invitation to others who may wish to participate (Babbie, 2007; Davidson & Tolich, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). As the topic area may have been considered sensitive to potential participants, snowballing seemed an appropriate sampling method. This method was a way of developing trust within the diverse gender community towards an outsider conducting the interviews. As people within the diverse gender community shared the information about my research through their networks interest was generated that may not have occurred with a “blanket” invitation.

Sample size

There are no clear guidelines for how many participants is enough in qualitative research, however there are suggestions in the literature about how to decide. My main consideration was to ensure the sample size was large enough to answer the research questions posed at the start of the study (Merriam, 2014; Moore, 2013). It was important that a range of cultures, gender identities, and tertiary institutions were included. However, it was also important that the sample size was manageable for a Master’s level research project. I considered that a well worked small sample would produce more data than a badly worked out large sample (Dawson, 2009). The key when deciding on the sample size was to be transparent about how the decisions were made (Evers & de Boer, 2012). I considered the depth and detail that would provide this study with a rich set of data, while acknowledging that due to the scale of this project I was not going to be able to collect a large enough set of data to be representative of the entire diverse gender population. Although it was difficult to identify how many participants would provide enough data at the beginning of the study (Dawson, 2009), it has been suggested the five to eight participants is enough to provide a rich data set when interviewing participants for a study of this nature (Tracy, 2012). I therefore set a goal of at least five participants and planned to review that number as the study progressed.

Participant selection

Initially, 18 people indicated an interest in participating in the study. The selection criteria, which had also been published with the information about the study, was applied to ensure a range of cultures, gender identities, and tertiary institutions were included. When I had

interviewed seven participants, it became clear that strong themes were emerging consistently and I had reached a sample size that was large enough to provide a level of representation appropriate for the scale of this study.

Five participants identified as Pākehā/European/Caucasian, one as Māori, and one as a Cook Islander. It is also important to note that no intersex people were part of this study. Given the small scope of this study the representation achieved was considered acceptable.

METHODS

Semi-structured interviews

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. Polit and Beck (2014) identify this method as a well-established form of data collection when seeking to gather information about people's experiences. In-depth interviews gave me the ability to develop open-ended questions that provided a basic structure for the interviews while also enabling participants to lead the conversation in the directions they deemed important. This flexibility created the potential to acquire in-depth information about the participants' experiences (Turner, 2010).

The interview questions were separated into three sections. The first section explored what brought the participants to tertiary study and how they felt about studying before they started. There were two main reasons for this section being included: firstly, it provided a way for me to build a connection with participants as they shared their reasons and feelings; secondly, it provided information about participants' expectations before their tertiary study commenced. The second section of questions was about any experiences of discrimination the participants had experienced during their tertiary study. This section was directly linked to my research aim and question about whether discrimination occurs in tertiary environments. This section of the interview schedule also provided data about how any reported discrimination was occurring. The third section asked about which strategies the participants felt supported them to feel valued and included. This section linked to the research aim and question about what strategies create inclusive tertiary environments. A full list of interview questions can be found in Appendix B.

Although the interview schedule was prepared in advance and sent to the participants before the interview, on the day a given interview became a dialogue between myself and the participant. This semi-structured interview design has been reported as being useful when researching experiences of discrimination as the evolving nature of the dialogue creates space for the participants to share not only their experiences of discrimination, but also the strategies that they created in response (Gamson, 2000). When provided with open-ended questions the participants often shared the challenges they had faced, as well how they had overcome them.

While the flexibility of this kind of semi-structured interview creates the opportunity for a wide scope and so allows a wider range of data to become available (Rodwell, 1998), there are also challenges to using this method of data collection. Hoffman (2007) notes that in-depth interviews can be complex and can potentially stray outside the parameters of the study. For example, the data can be distorted by inappropriate input from the interviewer; unrecognised power dynamics can also produce unreliable data. After reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses of this form of data collection, I decided it was the most effective method for creating the rapport required between myself and the participants and would enable the sharing of highly personal information.

In order to ensure the data collected was reliable, I paid close attention to preparation for the interviews. Turner (2010) states that preparation can either make or break the interview process and therefore the value of the data collected. As well as considering carefully the types of questions that would be asked, I also 'pilot tested' the interview questions with the consultation group. This testing provided an opportunity to identify any limitations or weaknesses in the proposed questions and enabled the questions to be refined as required (Turner, 2010).

Consideration was also given to the interview venues. It was important that the venues met the needs of both the researcher and the participants. In recognition that the interview questions required a level of personal disclosure, privacy and comfort were important considerations. It was also important that the participant did not need to travel far to get to the interview. Participants were already being generous with their time and I did not want to

impose any more than was necessary. In addition to supporting participants' comfort, it was also important that a given interview space was suitable for using a voice recorder. I was also aware of ensuring I did not put myself into potentially dangerous situations. Most interviews were undertaken in public places like individual study rooms in libraries or in an office. When the most suitable venue was a participant's home I ensured that someone knew where I was going and put in place a plan for support in case of an emergency. Most interviews were face-to-face; however, one was undertaken via Skype because we were unable to arrange a physical meeting.

Consultation group

As a ciswoman researching the experiences of the diverse gender community, it was important for me to both educate myself about the experiences of this community and create relationships with those who have lived experiences of diverse gender identities. This networking started several years before the study began. From my work in the queer community, I already had connections with others working in this field. As I began to explore ideas for this study, I approached several key members of the gender diverse community to discuss my thoughts. They pointed me in the direction of what research reports and books to read and what movies to watch, and recommended online resources for me to explore.

I seriously considered whether I was an appropriate person to be conducting this research, based on my limited lived experience of challenging gender norms. Although there is research identifying challenges connected to being an outsider researching a specific community, it has also been noted that sometimes outsiders can create space for participants to speak more freely than they would to someone within their own community (Allen, 2010; Hartman, 2015). Previous research has also noted that it is possible for people representing the norm, in this case gender conforming, to be part of creating 'anti-normative' knowledge (Allen, 2010). It is recognised that New Zealand is lacking in research that focuses solely on the diverse gender students' experiences (Burford et al., 2013) so I decided that with systems in place to check my own assumptions, language, and processes, I could potentially be an effective part of addressing this gap in the literature.

Awareness of how my cisgender identity may have affected the study led me to invite a group of gender diverse people who were either tertiary students, or had been in the recent past, to form a consultation group for this study. I am clear that this group was not representative of the entire gender diverse community as shared identities do not automatically create shared understandings (Allen, 2010). However, I did want to create the opportunity to reflect on whether dominant social norms could interfere with my collection of the data. The consultation group comprised five people with a range of gender identities from Māori, Pasifika, and Pākehā cultures. The members agreed to provide support and feedback during the research design about inclusive language and practices. They also offered to share information about the research through their networks when I was seeking participants, which helped increase the reach of the recruitment process into the diverse gender community. The group was consulted during the design of the project in relation to the development of the interview questions and information sheet. Also, once the initial data analysis had been completed, the themes were shared with the group. I invited them to review the themes that I had identified as a way to check my interpretation of the data for cisnormative bias. The generosity of this group supported me to undertake such reflections and also provided the opportunity for a 'reality check' as I progressed through the study.

I used many different ways of connecting with the consultation group: face-to-face meetings, emails, phone calls, and informal catch-ups. The availability and guidance of this group has been invaluable and has supported me to develop understanding, sensitivity, openness, respect, and responsiveness. However, any mistakes I may have made are my own; I do not hold consultation group members in any way responsible for these.

Internal validity

Throughout this study, I worked to ensure that any explanations I presented were clearly linked to the data collected and that the findings presented would be relevant to the initial research questions (Cohen et al., 2007). To ensure the internal validity of the data collected, I worked to minimise bias within the interview questions. As previously mentioned I thought carefully about the language I was using and any implied bias that may have been present. For example, one of the first questions in the interview was about what pronouns the participant used to refer to themselves. This question ensured I did not make incorrect assumptions, both when interacting with participants and when reporting the findings. Once I had drafted the

interview questions, the consultation group reviewed them and provided feedback about their suitability. Based on this feedback, I altered some wording to avoid confusion; for example, I had used the word 'journey' when referring to participants' experience of study. It was pointed out that some participants may have assumed I meant their gender transition 'journey'. Therefore, I changed the question from '*How do you feel about your journey so far?*' to '*How did you feel about beginning your study?*' Underlying this change was the assumption that in reflecting on this questions participants would review their study experience from start to present thus discussing a 'journey'.

Once the interviews were completed they were transcribed. In order to ensure that the data collected aligned with what the participant intended to share, I confirmed the transcripts' descriptive validity with the participants. Maxwell (1992) states that creating a process for checking the accuracy of the transcripts addresses this concern. The interview transcripts were returned to the participants for review within a few weeks of the interview. Participants were asked to check the transcripts for accuracy and to consider anything they wished to remove or add. Six of the seven participants returned the transcripts with either confirmation that no changes were needed or requested amendments. I created a spreadsheet that tracked the different requests to ensure all the requested changes were made to the transcripts before analysis began.

A further area of validity I considered was interpretive validity. I also confirmed interpretative validity by checking that the meanings I had attached to the data matched the participants' perspectives (Maxwell, 1992). Once the initial data analysis had occurred, the codes I created were shared with the participants along with the general themes I had identified. The participants were asked if these codes and themes reflected their experiences as tertiary students.

My intention at this point in the research process was to ensure that I had not misinterpreted participants' stories. I also included the consultation group in reviewing the codes and themes. This process confirmed that the codes and themes I had identified matched the experiences of the participants. Neither the participants nor consultation group members suggested any

changes. By ensuring my account of participants' experiences matched their realities, the internal validity of the data was strengthened (Lynch, 1996).

DATA ANALYSIS

The interviews produced a rich data set from a small sample of people. I wanted an analysis model that could draw out patterns from the many different concepts and insights present in the data. An inductive process in which the analysis could be driven by the data (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006) seemed appropriate. Thematic analysis was chosen as it enabled me to identify themes both within the individual data sets from each participant, and across the entire data set (Braun, Peus, Weisweiler, & Frey, 2013).

I wanted a clear process for analysing the data to create transparency, so a six phase process was used as set out by Braun and Clarke (2006). Following is a table that shows how each step was implemented.

Table 1 Summary of process used for analysis

1. Familiarise myself with the data	I read the entire data set (7 transcripts) in one day.
2. Generate initial codes	I created a list of codes (App D) from the initial reading in step 1, then went through each transcript individually and applied codes to all the noticeable features. A spreadsheet of codes was created.
3. Search for themes	Codes were grouped together across the entire data set and themes began to be identified.
4. Review themes	I reviewed themes to ensure all coded material was included.
5. Define and name themes	The codes and themes were sent to participants and to the consultation group for feedback.
6. Produce the report	Findings and discussion of findings were written up.

Before I began the analysis I considered the impact of my own beliefs and biases on the analysis process (Hartman, 2015; Lofland et al., 2006; Schwandt, 2000). Although I recognised it was not possible to be free of these biases, it was possible to acknowledge them and be aware of how they could affect the research. I journaled my thoughts and talked about them with the consultation group and with my supervisor. For example, my background as a social justice activist sometimes seeped into my thinking and into the development of this study. By identifying this tendency I was able to return to the role of researcher and ensure that the data extracted from the information provided by the participants were representative samples and not just of interest to me individually (Cohen et al., 2007).

As well as reflecting on my own assumptions and biases, I also wanted a theory that would support the challenging of social norms relating to gender. As previously mentioned, queer theory provided this framework as it challenges the normative social ordering of gender identities (Fryer, 2012; Gamson, 2000). Adding this post-constructivist analytic lens can be seen as a way to make more room for previously suppressed voices to be heard (Gamson, 2000).

ETHICAL ISSUES

This study received approval from Unitec's Research Ethics committee, an accredited institutional ethics committee. This approval process gave me an opportunity to deeply contemplate the design of this research project and consider how I would ensure that I would both gather the data required to answer my research questions and respect the people involved as participants.

Informed consent

While I could not perceive any risks from participating in this research beyond those experienced in participants' everyday lives, I was also aware that participants may experience some discomfort because of the personal nature of the questions. Ensuring that informed consent was obtained (Appendix C) meant including enough detail about the research in the project's Information Sheet so that those considering volunteering for the study were aware of what was expected. All participants self-selected to participate. No-one was approached directly, rather all participants heard about the project through the Information Sheet being shared among the diverse gender networks.

Personal agency

In addition to the self-selection process, there were also clear messages, both in writing and verbal, about the personal agency of each participant once data collection began. As participants were encouraged to ask questions as they arose, were affirmed in their right to not answer any interview questions as they wished, and advised that they could completely withdraw from participating if they chose (within two weeks of receiving the interview transcript), an underlying recognition of their personal autonomy was present. These messages are considered standard practice for all qualitative research projects, but I ensured they were highlighted on several occasions in different ways as the diverse gender community sometimes experiences a reduced sense of personal agency (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). I also sent each participant the interview schedule two weeks before the interview so that they were aware of the kinds of questions I was going to ask. This preparation served multiple purposes. Firstly, it provided some guidance about the areas of their tertiary study I was interested in; secondly, it provided reassurance that questions about participants' bodies or other intrusive, unnecessary questions would not be asked. There was a covert message in these pre-

interview communications that suggested I was well-prepared and valued the participants' input. In addition to ensuring that participants were aware of the potential risks and benefits of participation before starting, this attention to informed consent helped to build rapport, trust, and mutual respect as this type of communication provides clarity and transparency (Sieber & Tolich, 2013).

Confidentiality

As well as informed consent, I also considered how confidentiality would be maintained and how I would communicate this point to participants. Confidentiality primarily related to the data that was gathered and the agreements about who would have access to it (Sieber & Tolich, 2013). The Information Sheet was very clear that participants' identities would remain confidential and this provision was also mentioned at the start of each interview. While this process is standard ethical practice, it has been noted that people from minority groups can be doubtful of promises perceived as vague (Sieber & Tolich, 2013); hence my attention to detail and multiple references to the information.

The Consultation Group suggested I include very specific details about how participants' names and interview transcripts would be protected, with the reminder that it is better to address any concerns up front rather than people having to ask. This feedback led me to develop rigorous processes for separating out names and identifying features from the very beginning of this study, as well as securely storing interview recordings and transcripts separately to ensure they could not be accessed at the same time in case of a security breach (for example, a lost laptop or hard drive). In addition, all the participants were given a pseudonym to protect their identities. The details of pseudonyms, pronouns, and gender identities cited when reporting the findings were checked with each participant to ensure they were appropriate.

Conflicts of interest

I also considered where potential conflicts of interest could occur. Although the study was not focused on one particular tertiary institute, as an employee of a New Zealand Polytechnic it was important for me not to be seen to be biased towards particular practices. Therefore, I included in my Information Sheet the statement that I was not funded by my employer to

undertake this research and was not accountable to them for any of the findings. On one online forum, this statement did raise questions about whether this meant I was not accountable for working in line with the Ethics Approval process throughout the study. However, once it was clarified that this statement referred to the reporting of findings and not the research processes the concern was put to rest. Another conflict of interest I considered was interviewing close friends or current students. It could be perceived that these existing relationships could affect the information shared. Therefore, I decided that I would not interview people from these two areas of my networks.

Emotional wellbeing

While I did not expect participants to experience distress from taking part in this study, I was aware that some unsettling memories might be triggered by the interviews and the process of reflecting on their experiences as diverse gender tertiary students. As an experienced facilitator and mediator, I was confident in my ability to sense when a participant was becoming upset and to de-escalate such situations. However, I also wanted to ensure that additional support was available if required. I contacted OUTLine, a community organisation that provides free counselling services via trained counsellors proficient in gender diversity issues, to inform them of my research and confirm that I could pass on their details to participants if needed. However, none of the participants needed additional support and all appeared more than capable of managing their own participation and responses.

LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

When considering an appropriate methodology, I also thought about the limitations of the interpretivist paradigm within which this study is located. Although semi-structured interviews provide a rich source of data from participants, the data are limited to how the participants interpret, recall and then communicate their experiences (Polit & Beck, 2014). As I have not directly observed the experiences of the tertiary students in this study the data are limited to their memories and interpretations of events. This limitation was one of the reasons I included a time limit of recent tertiary study as a selection criterion (to reduce the chance of recall diminishing over time).

Another limitation of this study is the dominant voice of Pākehā/European participants. It was important to me that an Aotearoa/New Zealand study included Māori and Pasifika voices. However, it soon became apparent that the large majority of those expressing interest in the research were Pākehā/European. I reflected on how to increase connection with Māori and Pasifika communities and made further contact with specific leaders in those communities to spread the word about the research in an attempt to increase participation from these communities. I considered the current New Zealand population statistics that show Pākehā/European at 74.5%, Māori at 15.6% and Pasifika at 7.8% (Statistics New Zealand, 2015). The final participant pool was 70% Pākehā/European, 15% Māori and 15% Cook Island which I considered acceptable.

SUMMARY

This chapter has provided a rationale and justification for assuming a subjectivist epistemological position for this study and working within an interpretivist paradigm. I have justified the use of semi-structured interviews and thematic data analysis and have covered the ethical issues that were considered as I undertook this study. The next chapter will report on the findings that this research project has produced.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

OVERVIEW

This chapter presents findings gathered from the seven semi-structured interviews described in the previous chapter. The first set of findings covers the different forms of discrimination that students experienced and outlines how these experiences have impacted those involved. The second section covers the strategies that were identified to address discrimination, both at personal and institutional levels.

DISCRIMINATION

The first research question asked whether participants experienced discrimination, and if they did, what kind(s) of discrimination had occurred. Discrimination is often described as someone being treated unfairly or as “less than” another person in the same situation. The most interesting finding from the interviews is that six out of seven participants reported not having been discriminated against. This lack of reporting appears to be because they did not experience people behaving towards them in directly unkind or violent ways. As one participant put it, “... there are no tomatoes being thrown, I’ve never had any slurs thrown at me that I am aware of. It’s just the insidious stuff, the microaggressions¹ and inconvenience”. Another participant reported experiencing microaggressions but said, “there isn’t that outright discrimination that you might experience at undergrad if you are unlucky enough”. However, what became apparent when analysing the findings was that all participants were treated differently than their gender conforming peers in a variety of ways throughout their tertiary educational experience. Specifically, throughout the findings, there is consistent evidence that the participants have clearly been discriminated against because of their gender identities. I will discuss this mismatch of experience and perception relating to discrimination in Chapter 5.

The participants’ experiences of discrimination were wide ranging; however, three main areas stood out as impacting on all the participants: gender normativity, administrative processes,

¹ This is a term the participant introduced into the interview. As discussed in Chapter Two, it refers to small but regular insults, dismissals and general hostility commonly experienced in day-to-day life.

and a lack of staff awareness. Gender normativity created a range of challenges including others making incorrect assumptions about the participants, the issue of when to disclose one's gender identity, and the self-editing that occurred as participants navigated their way through their educational experience. Most participants reported difficulty with administrative processes and policies. It was noticeable that different levels of difficulty were experienced by the participants; however, there was a common thread that processes reflecting diverse gender identities were either not in place or staff and students were not aware that they existed. This invisibility of diverse gender identities in policies and processes linked to the third area of discrimination reported by all participants: a general lack of awareness from staff about diverse gender identities. Although occasionally there were staff members who demonstrated a level of knowledge and/or experience, participants were often in situations where they needed to educate staff about diverse gender people in order to get their needs met. Many participants reported this educational role as an energy drain that distracted them from their own study.

While analysing the findings, it became apparent that ongoing, mostly covert, discrimination had a negative impact on the participants. All participants reported some level of stress directly related to how others interacted with them and a need to remain on "high-alert" for possible discrimination. This section will also report on this form of minority stress and the impact of being part of a marginalised group.

Gender normativity

Gender norms can lead to incorrect assumptions as people expect everyone to conform to a binary model of gender. One way these assumptions manifest is others using a pronoun that does not match the gender identity of the person referred to. This phenomenon can be described as 'misgendering'. There was an acknowledgement from all participants that gender pronouns are an important part of how they experience the world.

Lennox², who identifies as genderqueer and uses they/them pronouns, talks about the effect of people using female pronouns to refer to them:

² Pseudonyms are used for all participants; gender identities and pronouns remain unchanged.

I feel that female pronouns are much too heavily weighted in terms of gender. To me, it feels like the pronoun takes the societal expectations of what we consider to be a woman and places it upon me like a mantle I'm supposed to uphold. It makes me very uncomfortable, especially when referred to as 'that girl' or 'that lady'.

In addition to the discomfort caused by the societal expectations that come with particular pronouns, participants also spoke of the humiliation they experienced when they are misgendered in public. Tania, a transgender woman, talks about being called "Mr" in public as "the scariest thing" that could happen. Tania describes a doctor's appointment where the medical files are in her birth name, and discusses a common reaction from the medical staff when she is called in for an appointment. Tania talks about the "double-take" staff sometimes make. On one occasion when Tania's birth name was called out and Tania stood up "[the nurse] started looking back, she looked again [as] if [to say] 'it was Mr!' I said, no it is me! In front of everybody". Tania describes needing to show a brave face while she "cringes inside". These experiences highlight the distress caused by being referred to by a pronoun that does not match a person's identity. The assumptions others make based on a small piece of information, such as a name on a page or a way someone is dressed, are informed by the binary gender norms of our society.

Most of the participants spoke about the need to speak up about their gender identities to avoid being misgendered. Due to gender norms, it is often assumed that people are cisgendered and if they are not, it is seen as the responsibility of those with a diverse gender identity to disclose to the person making the incorrect assumption. In addition to needing to disclose their gender identity, the participants also reported incidents where even after disclosing their gender identity they still experienced staff making inappropriate assumptions about pronouns. Tatum, a transmasculine person who uses they/them pronouns shared their experiences in the classroom in this vein:

I did have a few problematic incidents like I had one of my lecturers who thought it was all right to call trans people "it" and that we liked being referred to as "it". So I had to basically give the class a lesson in pronouns that day.

This need for diverse gender students to educate staff, covered in more detail below, indicates how a lack of knowledge can lead to damaging assumptions that participants often reported facing.

Even when staff are educated about diverse gender identities they can still make incorrect assumptions. Tatum described a situation where staff and students had been using the correct pronoun for some time until a supervisor misgendered them in an online communication and then others started using the wrong pronouns as well:

At the time it was quite upsetting and I wasn't sure what to do, but when I did approach the supervisor they did act in all the ways appropriate, e.g. apologise, and then sought to rectify the situation rather than put the onus on me. I should note, however, that this person was experienced in queer issues and so understood how to deal with these sensitive incidents.

What stood out in the findings was how being called by the correct pronoun, something that the majority of people take for granted, has a significant, positive impact when experienced by gender diverse people. Tania described the intensity of the feeling in simple terms when reflecting on her doctor's visits: "I love it when [a nurse] just calls me her".

In addition to the importance of correct pronoun use, participants often spoke about the different ways that they described their gender identities. Those who challenge societal norms often create terms, or labels, to describe their experience of the world. These labels can be used proactively to mark a non-normative space, and some participants reported finding these labels empowering and a way to create a sense of belonging and legitimacy. Lucy, who identifies as M2F whakāwahine takatāpui, spoke about the different ways she has identified over the years since first disclosing her gender identity, and about the process of finding a term that feels appropriate:

Like transsexual. When I first came out that was the word I used to describe myself and I hate that word. But then transgender became more the currency that people were using and I sort of didn't like that either. So I identify as whakāwahine because it gets away from the clinical description of who I am. I don't see myself as a collection

of clinical things. Surgeons do but I don't, I tend to see it in a more holistic way. So that is a term that really suits me.

Some participants found that the labels they used created confusion for others. When there is a lack of understanding about the many different gender identities that exist, incorrect assumptions can be made about how a particular gender identity impacts other aspects of a person's life. Lennox explained that their gender identity is more of an "amorphous blob" as no gender terms accurately describe their experience. However, they use the "gender fluid" label as it seems the best option currently available. This fluidity of identity, combined with whom they date, creates confusion for others and often leads to incorrect assumptions from others about their sexuality:

People just thought I was lesbian, whereas I identified and still do as bisexual. The 'correct' label would be pansexual. However, I don't think bisexual is transphobic, as many would claim, because I don't adhere to the gender binary. People who aren't familiar with these concepts are easily confused, and often it can't be cleared up with [an] explanation. And I'm like, it's ok, I like people. I like some people, I like other people.

Incorrect assumptions about gender identity, pronouns and sexual identity were the most commonly reported examples of how gender normativity created discriminatory behaviour towards the participants.

Participants also reported many comments made by others that, in other contexts, would have been widely accepted as inappropriate. However, when said in relation to gender identities they were considered acceptable. Sometimes the comments came from staff and although other students also felt they were inappropriate, they were unsure how to address the problem. Lucy talked about a lecturer who "was so homophobic and transphobic that even straight people were saying, 'oh those things that he says, they are all directed at you, you do realise that?'" In this instance, Lucy reassured her fellow students she was aware of what was occurring and would address it when she was ready. It is interesting to note that the other students did not feel it was their responsibility to address the lecturer directly with their concerns about his behaviour.

Other participants reported students' inappropriate behaviour and questions in relation to their gender identities. Tatum described an experience with a fellow student who assumed it was all right to ask deeply personal questions once they discovered Tatum's transmasculine identity:

Recently I was working on a summer project and the student I was working with caught on that I was transgender, and proceeded to ask a number of inappropriate questions, including the usual things about genitalia etc. The student was studying to become a doctor so instead of rejecting his questions I actually answered them, in the hopes that it would be valuable if he ever had a transgender client. Looking back on it made me feel quite uncomfortable. The interaction was so normalised like he thought it was completely fine asking these invasive questions.

In addition to questions that non-consensually objectified participants, there were also examples of students telling stories that were clearly transphobic. Although these were often said in a light-hearted way, they are still hurtful and were not challenged by those listening to them. Matua, a trans male, shares his experience of a student describing an incident from his own past in a way that shows no sense of remorse or acknowledgement of his inappropriate behaviour:

There was one guy that tried to emphasise a part of his upbringing and he talked about as a kid he would go and throw stones at the queens on K road and chase them and it was his way of having a laugh. I mean, I listened to that and I would look at him like, oh you are just a wannabe.

These examples demonstrate how those conforming to gender norms experience privilege while those who do not conform are punished. In this situation, the student had the privilege of being able to express their experiences of punishing those not conforming to societal norms without challenge.

Other inappropriate comments reported by participants related to bathroom use. Many participants talked about either their fear that others would challenge their use of a particular bathroom or times when such challenge had actually occurred. Jay, who identifies as agender and uses he/him pronouns, described an incident when he was trying to use a bathroom that had a wheelchair sign on it as there were no other gender-neutral toilets available:

I remember one woman, you have to push the door button and wait for [the toilet door] to close and I pushed the button and I was waiting for it to close and this woman pokes her head in and goes, oh are you allowed to use the handicapped ones? And I go, it's also for gender neutral stuff. And the door is closing and I'm bursting and really uncomfortable and she's like, what? [and I think] I have to pee! Can you get your head out of the door because I just want to pee in peace! And this is not your business!

Although this question about bathroom use may seem like an appropriate question to some, it is a clear example of how the lack of gender neutral bathrooms creates intrusions into gender diverse people's lives that result in embarrassment and frustration.

The findings indicate that this lack of privacy that the participants face is experienced in many different ways. As previously mentioned, participants often reported feeling the need to disclose their gender identities as a way of preventing the incorrect assumptions of others. All the participants mentioned the challenges they face in relation to disclosing their gender identity as outside of the gender binary. While different participants had different responses to the issue of disclosure, a common theme that emerged was the tendency to disclose one's gender identity to close friends before disclosing to family members. The main reason given was the fear of how their family members would respond. Sam, who identifies as gender fluid and uses she/her pronouns, spoke about how she does not disclose her gender identity most of the time; rather, she expresses her gender identity in ways that feel comfortable on a given day. However, when she did want to disclose her gender fluidity she started with her friends even though her parents "have always been open most of the time". Sam did go on to tell her parents so it could be that telling friends first was a way of practising within a safe environment.

Jay talks about having a trusted friend with whom he could talk to first and then the process of disclosing his gender identity and change of pronouns to each of his friends:

The first person I came out to was the guy that I affectionately call my brother. He bought me my first tie... and then I went from person to person, the people I knew to be cool with queer stuff... and then I did the rounds and I told them one by one. And I had anxiety, not necessarily anxiety but kind of like adrenalin, but none of them [were] really worried.

Although there were no negative responses from his friends, speaking to his mother was a challenge. Jay talks about knowing that at some point he will need to have a conversation with his mum that he is not ready for yet:

It will mean telling her the full story which I'm not ready to do. I couldn't articulate why I'm not, it's just that, that nigging fear you know? My mum is cool; my mum is super cool but this is a big thing.

While most participants disclosed their gender identities to their friends and fellow students when they were ready, Matua shared the unpleasant experience of being outed by another student:

One student actually outed me. It was quite incredible. It was in the second year... So at a party, they had a few get-togethers outside of class, a group of them got together and at this party, I don't go to parties but at this party, she decided to tell them.... So for two weeks the people who were at this party were really quite quiet around me and quiet in the class and a bit 'cliquey'. And it wasn't until after about two weeks they couldn't bear it any longer and they approached me.

Matua then goes on to describe how the tutors worked to address the situation but because of their own lack of confidence Matua found himself leading a class conversation about both his own identity and diverse gender identities in general:

I introduced myself, [and said] also I am a transsexual. I said, you are welcome to talk to me about it, you are welcome to come and ask me things. And I said the good things about it, I tried to turn it into a good situation, a positive thing. And after that, the entire class just got up and gave me a hug, even the guys.

While all participants disclosed their gender identities to varying levels as they felt appropriate, some felt discomfort about not yet having talked to their family about this topic. Lennox talked about moments when they were feeling upset and wanted to share what was going on for them with their mother. However, Lennox struggled to find the words to explain how they were feeling without using the word "daughter" because it "felt like venom in my mouth". Lennox described wanting to come up with ways to communicate with their mum that fitted their gender identity without confusing their mother. "I was trying to find a way

around [the word daughter] that wouldn't sound odd". However, this effort only added to the feeling of isolation for Lennox. "It just made me feel even worse not being able to express myself how I am, to my own parent". A few other participants also shared the challenges of disclosing their gender identities to their mothers and how those close family relationships were important to them.

Participants often reported having some groups of people in their lives that were aware of their gender identities and others who were not. This experience of a dual identities often led to different names and pronouns being used in different settings. Jay explains:

I've got two me's. There is the legal me and then there is the real me. And because of certain legalities I'm stuck with the legal me and can't quite shake it but I try to keep it in the background as much as possible.

Most of the participants reported experiencing this challenge when they have disclosed to friends and sometimes the tertiary provider but not their families. Lennox reports how they use different pronouns with different groups of people. "I use female pronouns at the moment because I haven't come out to my family. My friends who I am comfortable with knowing do [know about my gender identity], and I have asked them to use 'they'." Although Tania has fully transitioned since living in New Zealand and feels accepted here, people she loves back in her home country are still struggling with her transition:

It's easier over here to transition than back home. Back home it's still hard for me sometimes to meet certain people, people that I respect. I don't want them to see me like I am... back home or when they come here. Because you can see what they think.

Participants often reported times when they did not disclose their gender identities as a way of avoiding negative responses from others. This form of self-editing requires participants to be careful about what they say and do. Participants reported considering whom they were going to talk to, the places they could go to comfortably and what clothes they would wear. This level of self-editing requires a high level of energy to be constantly on guard and thinking about what to say and do. The participants often reported feeling exhausted and anxious as a result.

The high-awareness state that is required to maintain the level of self-editing participants described impacts on many day-to-day functions. Lennox describes their process for deciding which bathroom to use and how their particular mood on the day impacts those decisions:

It comes back [to] if I'm stressed out, it makes it very easy for me to be triggered by something that comes up about my gender or past issues. Going to the bathroom is a specific problem. Occasionally I'll be really stressed out and need to go to the bathroom, so I'll look for the closest to find that they're gendered. There is one bathroom at Uni that I have found that is a non-gendered bathroom, it's just a bathroom and they have got locked doors. Little individual rooms basically, which is perfect. But there is only the one of them and it's quite far away.

The participants often reported the differences in how their days go depending on their own levels of energy and whether they feel like facing potential challenges from others. Some days Lennox does not want to risk using a bathroom that will create comments from others; on other days they are either having a "good day" or just do not have the time between classes to get to the non-gendered toilet and so uses a gendered bathroom. However, using a gendered bathroom is stressful:

I try to make the trips as fast as possible though when I'm not in a cubicle. I'm quite terrified that someone will one day come in when I'm in the bathroom, they will come up to me at the sinks while I'm washing my hands and they will ask why I'm in there. The best solution for that is to keep my head down, wash my hands and leave.

While all participants shared different stories about the ways that they edit themselves to avoid confrontation, there was a generally held belief that people were mostly not being purposely hurtful but just, as Lennox explains, having "a difficult time understanding and accepting that this person is different from the norm they were brought up with".

Tatum commented that he thought it was less that people were purposely being unkind and more "people being naïve". Participants commented on how they look for clues about whether or not someone will be accepting of them. Sam looks for how people talk about other topics for hints about whether to disclose her gender identity:

I can pick up which people don't necessarily like the idea of gay marriage or anything. So when people don't tend to like the idea of gay marriage they don't tend to like the idea of people being outside the gender norms.

Jay also acknowledges the thought that goes into working out what to say to which people:

Sometimes it's worth the fight and sometimes it's just not. And sometimes people make you aware that they are receptive to it and so you don't have to fight, you just give them that information ... when you walk around in the way that I do for long enough, you get to know.

This ability to “read” other people appeared to be a skill developed from the daily interactions the participants experienced as diverse gender people. Matua talked about starting at a new tertiary provider and, because of previous experiences, being concerned at first that he would be treated unfairly. He describes himself as being a “little bit guarded and quiet and just wanting to have a low profile” in order to avoid potential negativity and gradually building his confidence back up to express himself freely. Tania also mentioned the discomfort that occurred when she first arrived in a new tertiary environment and the process of slowly fitting in. “I think after a while the students are quite accepting, you just become one of the students. It's just that at the beginning everyone is shy and then I see some not saying anything but they know.’

The findings showed that all participants were on high alert and waiting for negative reactions from others because they are part of a minority group that does not conform to gender norms. This constant state of thinking about what to say and do appeared to create exhaustion and stress for participants and will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Administrative processes and policies

In addition to the challenging personal interactions that gender normativity caused, the participants all spoke about the challenges they faced navigating administrative systems in tertiary environments. Three areas emerged as the most commonly reported areas of concern: the correct recording of gender and names during the application process; the rigidity of the current enrolment systems; and a general sense that including the diverse gender population within administrative processes was not a priority for tertiary staff. While all participants mentioned these areas as challenging, they experienced differing levels of problems.

Participants who had transitioned and had legal documents that reflected their correct name and gender experienced very few problems during the application process in relation to the correct name and gender being recorded in the system, as Matua explained:

The enrolment process was absolutely straightforward. The paperwork and working a bit around getting enrolled on the courses, no problems, no hassles. That was purely because I had no qualms about applying, I had already had my birth certificate changed so I was very confident in applying in my known gender.

Although those participants who had legal documentation regarding their transition prior to enrolment had no problems, those who transitioned during study experienced some difficulty. These difficulties were mainly connected to getting their names changed within the system. Participants reported little information being readily available from the tertiary provider about whom to approach to arrange this. Most participants reported receiving support from others in the gender diverse community to access support and information about how the tertiary systems work.

Lucy talks about how she supported another student through the process of getting his name changed in the tertiary provider's computer system, and how the relevant staff members responded:

He didn't know how to do it and I had never done it, but I knew it was possible. We went to the computer people and they went, 'oh we have never had one of those before. Oh yes, this is how we can fix that.' And it was fixed literally in a minute.

While in the end it was a simple process in this case, it took a degree of assertiveness and systemic knowledge to navigate each step of the way. The support that Lucy provided another student made navigating the administrative processes easier.

Compared to the participants who wanted to change their names and recorded gender within administrative systems using legal documentation, the participants who had either not transitioned yet or whose gender identity is fluid found the systems much more challenging. A couple of participants mentioned specifically that they found these administrative systems rigid and daunting when wanting to record a name that was different from that stated in their

legal documents. For instance, Lennox, who wanted to record a name that was different from the name of their birth certificate, said he found “the bureaucracy surrounding name and pronoun changes on and throughout [tertiary] legal documents ... very difficult.” They felt it was the “administration that causes problems in how strict the rules are.”

Many of the participants are known by names that are different from their legal name. While it was acknowledged that what constitutes a legal name is outside of the direct influence of the tertiary provider, frustration around the lack of perceived willingness by staff to solve these problems was often verbalised during the interviews. Jay spoke of his experience working with staff to record a name that is different from that stated on his birth certificate, and his frustration when he was told that it was not possible:

I think, my personal feeling is, as a university administrator you really do want to stick to the legislation ... you want to be seen to be doing what you have to do by law and I would characterise them as relatively conservative in terms of legalities ... so people are sticking to what they know rather than trying to branch out into new things where there is no legislation around it.

Similar bureaucratic challenges were also mentioned in relation to how tertiary providers record gender during the application process. Most participants commented on their discomfort at being presented with only two options, male and female³, when completing the application forms. Jay sums up the participants’ overall reaction as he describes his response to seeing these two options on forms: “Actually I can’t answer this question because there is no option for me!”. This sense of being either invisible or excluded was mentioned by many of the participants when discussing requests to identify their gender on different forms and surveys.

Another participant shared that after many years of “fighting” a tertiary provider, the organization included a third gender option within its enrolment systems. However, shortly afterwards the computer system was upgraded and the third option was no longer available. Once this oversight was brought to the attention of the leadership body a commitment was

³ Male and female are options for identifying sex, not gender.

made to reinstate a “gender diverse” option with the next update. Although this example demonstrates how staff can support solving problems as they arise, it was the gender diverse community that needed to advocate for the changes and then monitor their implementation.

Another issue that arose when discussing the application process with participants was the incorrect assumptions that staff made when assessing the suitability of an applicant for the programme. When Matua applied for a programme, at a tertiary provider that is different from the one in which he currently studies, he disclosed he was a trans man. As part of the application interview, he was asked about his mental health and if he had considered suicide due to his gender identity:

On this particular application, ... there was some kind of ...wording on there that I felt I needed to disclose that I was transgender, which I did. ... that was the thing that got addressed straight away in regards to me. Firstly, I got lectured to really, I didn't have a chance to say much, I was lectured to by this old chap. Then he went on to ask me about my mental wellbeing, my mental health in regard to being a transgender person and if I ever thought of killing myself and all these things that I really took an affront to. And I pretty much said to him, mate I actually save lives. People contact me to be saved. He goes, well that's not good enough, at the end of the day, you are not accepted onto this programme. Closed the books on me and pretty much showed me the door.

Whilst Matua was “gobsmacked at the attitude” and did not study with that provider, the impact of that encounter remained with him when he successfully enrolled with another tertiary provider. He did provide feedback to the provider via an online survey but there was no resolution and no formal complaint was lodged. “The only real legitimate thing I did was to complete the online survey, however through talking to people, people got to know what happened.”

Matua was not the only participant who did not lay a formal complaint about inappropriate staff behaviour. Most participants shared experiences involving staff behaving in ways that made them feel uncomfortable, but when asked what had happened to address the situation most participants had not spoken directly to the staff member. Instead, most participants spoke of either choosing to behave professionally towards the staff member in an attempt “to

prove him wrong” or ignoring the behaviour to avoid negative repercussions. Lucy talked about a concern, raised by a few participants, when responding to a question about lodging a formal complaint: “if I do ... how is this going to affect my grades?” Another response that several participants reported was the sense that the incident was too small to be worthy of a formal complaint. This lack of reporting was particularly in relation to the microaggressions that occur on a daily basis. The participants recognised that the anti-discrimination or misconduct policies cannot legislate against microaggressions as they often occur in isolation and are not seen as significant against the criteria for lodging formal complaints. Tatum spoke about how the staff are limited in their ability to support students experiencing microaggressions as “there is only so much that they can do” when the policies are designed for significant examples of discrimination from one person rather than the many small examples that occur from different people throughout the day.

Although most participants reported staff wanting to be supportive, participants reported not experiencing effective support from staff when trying to navigate the administrative processes. When seeking to solve the complex issues that surround recoding data in relation to diverse gender students, participants felt staff lacked awareness of the issues and the motivation to make the changes needed. Tatum expressed frustration with both the systems and an “it’s too hard” attitude from staff towards the challenges. Tatum could see the staff felt stymied by the complexity but felt they lacked the impetus to fix the problems and would have “all these excuses [why] you can’t change the systems because they are linked to other systems”.

Participants reported that administrative systems were often inadequate when it came to ensuring they were referred to by the correct name. Some tertiary systems had a process in place for listing a ‘preferred’ name; however, this option did not always ensure the student was referred to by this name. A number of participants identified the practice of passing around a roll for students to sign at the start of class as problematic, as is it often had legal names recorded instead of chosen names. These uncomfortable situations also seemed to be an area where diverse gender students support each other. Consider, for example, Lennox’s response to their friend’s legal name being on the class roll:

The roll got passed around to sign it so they know we have been there because there are a lot of students. And I usually sit next to them, and every time that roll comes round it's always wrong. It's always under the name that they are registered under, not their preferred name. I have taken to getting it before they do, erasing it as much as I can and writing it in correctly and making a note for them to please change it and then passing it [on]. They appreciate it because it is literally every time we go to the workshop. They shouldn't have to deal with that.

Several participants talked about their preferred name being listed but the lecturer still reading out their legal names. When asked why they thought this happened, the participants again attributed the behaviour to lack of awareness about the importance of the student being referred to by their correct names.

The findings showed that all participants had some level of frustration with administrative processes and policies that did not acknowledge diverse gender identities. The gender norms that inform the creation of the policies and processes mean that it is challenging to make changes without “unpicking” the entire system. The participants often reported that staff appeared to not recognise the importance of undertaking this challenging task.

Lack of staff awareness

Another key finding from the study is the general lack of staff awareness displayed in relation to the gender diverse population. Participants all reported providing gender diversity education to staff simply so the staff had a basic understanding about the participants needs in relation to their gender identities. Participants reported that although some staff did demonstrate a level of awareness about gender diverse people, this knowledge was probably attributable to their field of expertise rather than any general teacher education programmes.

Tatum spoke of a staff member who supported them in their study, not only interacting in an appropriate way with Tatum but also providing links to academic literature from a diverse gender perspective. Tatum noted that this experience was unusual and explained that “because she does a lot of feminist research,” this staff member had an increased level of awareness.

Jay also talked about how it felt to come into contact with a staff member who “got it”:

I've had a couple of teachers that have been really fantastic. One of them, I walked into the classroom and she was going around getting everybody's names, when I said my name was [name omitted,] that I wanted to be called [name omitted] she said, ok and what pronouns do you use?

This question about pronouns demonstrated to Jay that he had come across someone who understood gender diversity and was comfortable managing it in a classroom setting.

When participants mentioned a staff member who was supportive it was always in the context of their being unusual rather than an expected norm. All participants reported feeling compelled to provide information to staff, although there were many different motivations for this. Matua was required to present a topic to the class as part of an assessment and chose to talk about gender dysphoria as a way to educate both staff and students:

Yes, absolutely I did educate the staff. We had an opportunity to present on a topic we wanted to talk about. So my topic was gender dysphoria and I put up this amazing PowerPoint. And it got to the stage where there was a standing ovation, there were lots of tears, lots of crying and I got the staff standing up to me and [saying] 'how often do you get a student educating the educators, it's just happened'... I saw it as an opportunity to educate, to break down barriers.

Several other participants did not have such a positive experience. Tatum found it challenging when explaining to a staff member the importance of using they/them pronouns, finding that “she was more focused on the grammar than using gender neutral pronouns and the effect it has on students.” Tatum went on to talk about their hesitation in taking on the role of educator:

If I knew they were all getting diversity training I would probably be more open to speaking. I don't think the students should be the ones to educate their lecturers ... because I don't think it's our job. You can just go on Google.

Another strong theme that emerged in relation to the lack of staff awareness regarding diverse gender identities is the impact of the participants needing to spend energy educating staff.

Participants often indicated how tiring this educational role was. Matua spoke about the pressure of being a role model for other students. "It's not easy, it's hard work. You have to deal with your other everyday workload that you have to do and performance and group activities and being switched on." He spoke of days when he wanted to come to class and just focus on his own study.

Tatum spoke about an internal conflict between speaking up to interrupt gender normativity and staying quiet to preserve energy:

Every so often ... things come up, I'd be sitting there thinking, I want to say something, I want to disrupt it. I feel like that imperative to be the social justice activist and speak up every time someone does a wrong but that's too exhausting to do all the time.

Tatum spoke about being willing to talk about their transmasculine gender identity at the beginning of studying but after a while the constant attention became draining. "I was all right doing it but this year I almost wanted to count how many times in my classes ... [my gender identity] came up as being like a thing, the topic almost switched to talking about my identity."

What comes through strongly in the findings is the amount of energy it takes the participants to address the lack of staff knowledge about diverse gender people, and the negative impact this effort has on their own personal study.

Minority stress

Minority stress occurs when a person is part of a marginalised group and their values are in conflict with those of the dominant, or majority, culture. This stress response and the hypervigilance linked to it stem from experiencing discrimination, working to conceal a part of oneself that is not in line with majority values, and the expectation of rejection if that concealment is not successful.

Many of the examples cited above demonstrate that diverse gender students are experiencing situations in which others are not only making incorrect assumptions, but also approaching participants with inappropriate comments or invasive questions. These constant microaggressions may be considered small acts in isolation but when experienced repeatedly

over long periods, create distress and anxiety. What is also clear within the findings is that all the participants created effective personal strategies for dealing with these experiences. These strategies will be discussed further in the second section of this chapter.

All those interviewed were aware that prejudice and discrimination occur and all were, to varying degrees, on guard and ready for this to occur. One of the ways this hypervigilance manifested was through participants not doing certain things that would disclose their gender identities, for fear of future consequences. Lennox explains why they do not disclose their genderqueer identity to everyone:

People would probably start avoiding me, because when people don't understand something, often times they will just avoid it altogether. To avoid trying to understand it or just because they are frightened about a new concept, which I understand.

Most of the participants reported some level of awareness about how these experiences negatively impact their confidence levels. Tania reported feeling concerned even when the comments being made were meant to be positive: "But what's funny is when I came in and one of the lecturers ... said 'oh you bring flamboyance to [tertiary institution]!' And I said, oh my gosh am I overdressed?" Although the staff member reassured her that this remark was meant as a compliment, Tania's immediate repose was to assume she had done something wrong. Tania's response mirrored other comments from participants and they seemed to be aware of the pressure to conform to group norms and had a desire to 'fit in'.

Jay described how the feeling of many small but hurtful interactions builds up during the day, and knowing it will happen again the next day with little that can be done to stop it occurring:

It's when it piles up all day. That's exactly what microaggressions do. If you say to me, 'is your name really (name omitted)?' I can laugh it off but if you are the 50th person to ask me that today, that piles up and it's hard. And it's chipping away. That's what microaggressions do. You can't legislate against microaggressions because people don't know they are doing it. And it's so hard to pin it down too... You can't legislate it ... you can only educate.

In addition to these constant, seemingly minor comments from others that all participants reported, there were also some examples of overt prejudice discussed. Matua experienced an extremely unpleasant admissions interview, as previously mentioned, at which he was declined a place on a programme, in part because he is a trans man. Matua is very clear that this incident negatively impacted on his confidence:

The impact of going through that... was hugely evident to my workmates and to my colleagues. They knew, they just had to look at me and go 'are you all right mate?'... Then I started doubting so many levels of my existence, not just about being a trans but about being a Māori and from a particular family who are not academic achievers. I started to believe he's hit on something that I didn't see. I started to believe that maybe I am dumb, that's why none of my family have got degrees and why am I doing this.

Matua ended up applying for another institution and being accepted to a similar programme. He described how the memory of the above incident followed him when starting at the new tertiary provider:

[I was worried that] maybe when [tertiary provider] find out about me, and I don't have to tell them but maybe when they find out, they will treat me the same way [as the previous institution]. Maybe they are going to kick me out of the programme. All these things went through my mind.

Although these concerns did not stop Matua from embarking on his programme of study, it was a fear that was present for quite a while until he had built strong relationships with both the staff and students.

In addition to the negative comments and questions participants reported experiencing, unspoken expectations also became apparent. A few of the participants reporting feeling that others expected them to disclose their gender identities and that if they didn't they would be perceived as being deceitful. Tatum spoke about a related dynamic that they have noticed in relation to both sexuality and gender identities:

Queer people in the class always have to come out but other people it's just assumed that you can stay silent if you are a heterosexual or cisgendered. It's not a big thing but we are almost expected to declare our [identities] every single time.

Participants regularly expressed frustration that they would often be treated differently from those in the majority, along with a sense of resignation that nothing would change.

Over half the participants felt that the inclusion of diverse gender individuals was not important to staff and that the challenges they faced were unlikely to be resolved. The invisibility of diverse gender people within tertiary policies, processes, and curricula led them to believe that adapting the teaching environment to include them was not a priority. Lennox described their hopes for future inclusive spaces but described them more as aspirational goals rather than ones that are easily achievable:

The acceptance of other genders in university spaces would be fantastic. The changes to the administration and therefore normalisation of other genders would create less of a gap between cisgendered people and those of diverse gender in their understanding of one another and the trials they face. Unfortunately, due to the prejudice currently present in society, those of diverse gender are often seen as an auxiliary in my experience. Something not required to be involved but still present. If tertiary institutions could include the possibilities that diverse gender presents them in their administrative requirements it would be fantastic.

When Tatum talked about the challenges of not having gender neutral toilets they also alluded to their frustration that these are not provided:

It would just be so easy for them to just slap a gender neutral [sign] on the very first door you pass before you even get to the actual bathrooms. But they won't do anything like that, 'oh it will cost us too much money and then we have to redesign' or we have to consider all these people who bring up the, 'oh we are going to be sexually assaulted in the bathroom if we are going to do that'.

While participants had clear ideas about what changes would make a difference to them feeling included, they often counteracted these ideas with comments about the barriers that exist to such measures being implemented by staff. Lucy shared that the senior leadership at her institution is “very supportive” but noted that that support does not translate to the staff below who are responsible for implementing the policies, and said “that support doesn’t turn into practicalities”. Matua also reported that his tertiary provider is focusing on other areas and when considering how to support gender diverse students he believes the staff at the

institute “are too busy trying to set themselves up and there are some areas that aren’t a priority for them”.

Although the participants did not use the term minority stress to describe their experiences, there is clear evidence that a heightened sense of vigilance was required for the participants to move through their tertiary study in ways that worked for them. They developed many helpful strategies for managing this stress, but they were also often left tired and at times frustrated or even anxious.

Throughout this study many forms of discrimination were reported by participants. Although, as mentioned at the start of this section, there was a mismatch between participants experiencing discrimination but not always naming it as that. However, all participants were clear there were aspects of their tertiary experience that did not work for them because of their gender identities. Much of the discrimination was connected to how societal gender norms are woven throughout tertiary education structures and appear in staff attitudes. As Lucy says:

It’s silent. The discrimination is silent. It’s evasive ... and the minute you are not heard or you are not represented, that is when this invisible discrimination starts to happen. And there is no more insidious discrimination than people forgetting you are there.

STRATEGIES

The findings relating to strategies that support inclusive practice for diverse gender tertiary students can be divided into two categories. First are the personal strategies participants developed that demonstrate the resilience and adaptability required to succeed in the current tertiary environment. Second are the strategies participants identified as being useful for creating inclusive environments. These latter fall into two main categories: visibility of diverse gender people within policies and processes, and education for staff about the needs of diverse gender students.

Participants' personal strategies

The findings show that all the participants had developed their own personal strategies for managing the challenges of being part of a minority population within the tertiary sector. These strategies demonstrate resilience and a willingness to adapt to different situations. The participants all reported clear reasons for studying that included both career progression and an opportunity to have a "fresh start". These motivations appeared to support the participants to stay focused on their goals and overcome the challenges they faced. Many participants looked for safe spaces to be that could strengthen social connections with both other students and staff. Participants also reported accessing support that was available and putting boundaries in place to ensure they could stay focused on their study goals.

All participants created ways to develop strong social connections with other students and staff. For some participants creating social connections meant finding places where they could go to relax and feel comfortable. Lennox described how some of the spaces at their university felt like being at home where they could focus on studying. "I actually just really liked the environment there. It's quite comfortable; I don't feel pressured by any of the students around me." Sam joined the queer group on campus to find a space that felt comfortable and enjoyed the social activities and charity work the group arranged during the year. Sam found in that environment she could relax and did not feel the need to self-edit in the same way as with other groups due to the level of acceptance. Sam described the queer groups: "It's like a safe place to go so you don't have people judging you or getting up in arms about [your gender expression] as well".

However, not all participants wanted to belong to a queer group because of the dynamics that could occur within such groups. Tatum talked about finding the queer groups on their campus "quite cliquey," noting that "competition starts arising between the different queer groups on campus so I have just stayed away from those".

Tatum went on to describe a phenomenon that almost half the participants raised during the interviews -- gay students who were not inclusive of diverse gender students directing the queer spaces:

I notice in the queer groups on campus you get the same thing, you get queer groups of people who are happy to reinforce cisnormative stuff because it suits them. All the groups that are like, pro-gay marriage or something which is good for them but they won't engage in any activism which will actually help other people.

Different participants dealt with the issue of queer groups being dominated by gay students in different ways. Some just avoided those spaces and others created their own groups in order to meet their needs. Jay describes his experience of a queer group on campus and the motivation for starting a separate diverse gender group:

What we had on campus was [name of a queer group] and it was supposed to be for the queer kids on campus but it kind of got overrun by the gay white guys ... it became a gay guy hook up kind of thing ... a lot of people were dissatisfied with what they were doing and what they were about, so they started this new group.

This group then provided a safe space for the members to gather without needing to deal with the dynamics they found in the other queer groups. While all participants had different ways of finding places to belong, they all identified social connections and relationships as being important aspects of creating a sense of belonging.

Another strategy several participants reported using was seeking relevant support services available through the tertiary provider. Although they did not all access these services, knowing they existed created a sense of reassurance that people were available should they need support. Tania said, "It makes me comfortable to know that there is some support there, even if I might not need it". Sam also mentioned that being aware of the services available made a difference:

Well for me it's enough to know that the [counsellors] are there because they are pretty much always in the same place. I don't think I need any counsellor at the moment but if I need one they are there.

In addition to the general support services that were available participants also mentioned accessing specific diverse gender support such as scholarships. One participant received a transgender scholarship that could be used for personal requirements during their study.

“They gave me my scholarship ... that was really helpful. Bought me shoes and feminine clothes... and now that I am regularly buying pills and things like that it was a great help.” Most participants were aware of what services were available either through their own investigations or through networks to which they belonged.

As well as creating social connections and accessing support services, participants also created healthy boundaries to ensure they could focus on their education. Participants appeared to have clear limits on what behaviour they would accept from others and clear ideas about what they would and would not do. In general, these boundaries were commonly reported in connection to knowing when to stop educating others and focus instead on their own education. Lucy explained how she balances the different aspects of her life in this respect: “So I do my activism and I care for people and I try to keep a little bit of space for me.”

Another boundary many participants often discussed is their awareness that other people’s opinions about them do not need to have a bearing on how they see themselves. Tania describes clearly how she focused on not letting others’ reactions upset her:

I think for me I don't really care if they watch me or if they don't. I'm at the stage where I am just concentrating on my studies and what is important to me. I don't really care what people say, I've got to that stage where I am strong enough to not care, it doesn't matter what they think or what they say, it doesn't matter to me anymore. What matters are the people ...I care for and who care about me. I used to care a lot before.... To be strong ... I just block it out ... and you have to learn all those things to survive.

The ability to set clear boundaries was reported as being an effective strategy for remaining positive and staying focused on personal study goals. Along with the ability to create strong social connections with others and knowledge of what support is available, the participants demonstrated a high level of personal resilience to address the challenges they faced due to their diverse gender identities.

Visibility within policies and processes

When participants were asked what strategies support inclusive practice in tertiary education the strongest response was related to visibility of diverse gender identities in all areas of tertiary life. It was reported that visibility promoted a sense of belonging and feeling valued.

Several participants mentioned that having the correct gender and name recorded in the system makes a big difference. Lennox described an example of how tertiary institutes could ensure the correct data are gathered.

University forms should have a third option for gender with a box for preferred label (if any), along with a dropdown menu for preferred pronouns and a space beside your legal name for your preferred name if it hasn't been changed legally. That way, your academic transcripts would be correct for you and who you are.

While most participants wanted the ability to have the correct gender identities recorded on their files, some participants challenged the need for collecting data regarding gender at all. Jay suggested those gathering the data should consider not only how they collect gender details, but also whether they were relevant for each situation.

I think that a lot of the forms that you end up having to fill in online have a binary gender option on them and I think there should either be another option or they should scrap gender completely. Because why do you need to know?

Participants suggested that, alongside increasing the visibility of diverse gender identities on the different forms that are circulated during a student's tertiary experience, tertiary providers could also promote policies and processes that reflect diverse gender students' needs. Tatum described the importance of being able to easily access relevant information online.

When I was speaking to the equity people they were like, yeah we've got people we can speak to for this, this, this, and this and I was like, but nowhere on any of their sites did they have anything about transgender support. Even just little things that would make a difference if you saw that on a website. Because I know they have got a policy for transgender students but they never put it anywhere that anyone could see on their website.

When considering how to increase the visibility of diverse gender identities within tertiary settings Lucy suggested that tertiary providers “get the acronym in the strategic plan” so that the inclusion work can start from the top of the organisation and then be embedded specifically into the anti-discrimination policies and support service information.

Some participants also reported appreciating ‘activist’ staff members who advocated for systemic changes. Tatum appreciated a staff member who became active in promoting inclusive practices for diverse gender students because of having taught Tatum:

Yeah ...my supervisor is on the [faculty omitted] department’s equity board so she is trying to push some stuff, especially now that she has had a transgender student it’s making her even more active about it.

Lucy also talked about the benefit of having staff within the institute who see the need for policy change. On one occasion when there was a request to raise the rainbow flag on the institute's flag pole it became clear that there were no guidelines for whether or not this action was permitted. Lucy spoke to a staff member in an influential position and found a way to resolve the problem:

And she went, ‘I’m going to write a flag policy that makes it possible’. So having that person sitting at the top going, I’m going to make it work for these people is incredibly helpful.

Participants reported that increasing the visibility of diverse genders is a way of demonstrating to this population that they are considered important and that the tertiary provider is genuinely committed to creating inclusive environments.

Education

A strong link was found between the need to increase the visibility of diverse gender students and the importance of providing diversity education for staff. All participants reported the positive impact of having staff with an awareness of diverse gender identities. Staff demonstrated this awareness to the participants through their language and behaviours and

these actions contributed to an environment where the participants felt acknowledged and supported.

Participants experienced this support in different ways. Sam appreciated the way she was provided with relevant academic literature when presenting work in relation to diverse gender identities, as well as hearing that the lecturer had experienced working with diverse gender students in the past. Jay also found a staff member with previous experience of people with diverse gender identities who therefore knew to ask what pronouns he used and was “thrilled by it actually”.

Other participants talked about the pastoral care that was offered by staff who understood the challenges diverse gender people often face. Sam found a group of staff who arranged social gatherings for students, which not only created connections with other students, but also led to links with support staff.

[The staff] organised that rainbow tea party and they were there with us because they were queer themselves. They thought it was a good idea to have it in a place like that. One of them was a counsellor and they were there just to let us know that they were there if we needed them.

Tania had a staff member who could link her to suitable health providers through the institute's professional networks when she was having problems getting appropriate medical support.

Actually [name omitted] was really good in helping, in fact, she was very good at helping me get onto my pills ... she talked with one doctor at the [tertiary provider] clinic ... that's how I came to be on the hormones, so I just started this year.

Although all participants reported some positive experiences with staff awareness relating to diverse gender identities, they also acknowledged that these were not representative of their experiences with most of the staff they encountered. Jay's comment reflects the general feeling of all the participants: “She's an inclusive person who happens to work for the university, it's not that the university happens to be inclusive.” Tatum commented that they would like other staff members to become more aware of how gender norms can be challenged in the classroom in the way that one of their lecturers had:

I think making more of an effort would be nice, especially because she would probably be one of the best lecturers in the department for that. The other lecturers never would have even had a clue that they are reproducing these problematic things [such as gender norms].

The findings not only revealed the importance for participants of educated staff in creating inclusive environments for diverse gender students; participants also had clear expectations about related outcomes. Tania wanted staff to find a way to increase awareness of the unique needs of gender diverse students without separating them off from the cisgender students. “Treat them as you would any other student because they don’t want to be treated special.” Other participants also reported the desire for education to provide staff with a level of awareness that would enable them to interact confidently and capably in relation to diverse gender issues.

The findings demonstrated the importance of ensuring a wide range of voices were heard when creating educational sessions that increased staff capability for the diverse gender population. Tania highlighted the importance of ensuring multiple perspectives were heard to increase the effectiveness of inclusive practice. She suggested “more training which actually involves the students because a lot of the time training is provided by one person who gives their viewpoint on the issue and it becomes one-sided”. Matua also commented on the challenge of recognising that the diverse gender community does not speak with one voice:

Everybody is different. Even [within] our trans community [people] are extremely different. I find it hard because the spectrum is so broad, I could say one thing and the people next to me who are trans could say ‘no that’s not what I want’. It’s really tough.

Even though the challenges of providing education for staff was acknowledged, it was clear that not enough staff in the participants’ tertiary environments had adequate experience with how to consistently create inclusive environments. Overall, participants strongly suggested that education be provided for staff to raise awareness about the needs of diverse gender students. They suggested this would increase staff confidence and willingness to act in ways that challenges gender norms and would indicate that diverse gender students are valued by the tertiary providers.

SUMMARY

Findings indicate that although the participants did not generally identify as having experienced discrimination from direct attacks or violence, the negative effects of gender-normativity and microaggressions were constant companions during participants' tertiary study. Findings also highlight the resilience of gender diverse students and their ability to develop strategies to manage their experiences of being part of a marginalised group. Strategies participants identified as supporting diverse gender students to feel included and valued included those operating at a personal level, such as choosing when to disclose and how to interact with others, as well as institutional strategies related to administrative systems, staff awareness and anti-discrimination policies.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the data and overall findings presented in the previous chapter. The key findings relating to discrimination show that when gender normativity is woven throughout the tertiary experience, diverse gender students not only find the policies and processes challenging, they also perceive the staff as having little motivation to challenge these binary gender norms. Navigating an educational system that the participants felt excluded from created increased levels of stress and took energy away from their own personal study. However, the key findings relating to inclusive strategies demonstrate that the participants created effective personal strategies for addressing these challenges and had clear ideas about what systemic changes are needed.

The research questions provide the sub-headings in this chapter and the discussion for each research question is based on the themes that emerged from the participants' experiences. These themes are displayed in Table 2 and are organised according to the research questions.

Table 2 Research questions and data themes

Research Questions	1. Do gender diverse students experience discrimination related to their gender identities within tertiary settings? If so, how does this discrimination occur?	2. What strategies support the inclusion of gender diverse students within tertiary settings?
Key Themes	Gender normativity Administrative processes and policies Lack of staff awareness Minority stress	Education Visibility within policies and processes Participants' personal strategies

My conclusions and recommendations follow the discussion and outline key areas for both systemic change and future research.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Discrimination

Research Question One: Do gender diverse students experience discrimination related to their gender identities within tertiary settings? If so, how does this discrimination occur?

The findings clearly demonstrate that the participants experienced discrimination in a variety of ways. Gender normativity was prevalent in many different forms in all the tertiary settings and created barriers for the participants. Administrative processes and policies did not reflect the needs of diverse gender students. Participants also reported a general lack of staff awareness when interacting with gender diverse students. Although the participants did not usually use the term minority stress specifically, the experiences that were reported demonstrate the negative impact of being part of a marginalised group. Therefore, a key finding is that participants were experiencing minority stress within tertiary settings.

An interesting finding that emerged is that although there was ample evidence of discrimination occurring for all of the participants, when asked during the interview 'Have you experienced any kind of discrimination due to your gender identity?' most participants reported that they had not. The word discrimination was deliberately not defined when the question was put to participants, to avoid limiting participants' responses to this question. It may be that the participants consider discrimination to consist of interpersonal conflicts and violence and, as this type of discrimination had not occurred for the majority of students, they may have considered they had not experienced discrimination. However, all participants reported many instances of neither being treated with dignity nor in ways that reflect gender equality. These are basic human rights to which every tertiary student is entitled. A New Zealand Human Rights Commission's report noted that when gender diverse students do not experience being treated equitably and with dignity, they are experiencing discrimination that can undermine their opportunities to learn (Human Rights Commission, 2008).

In addition to the examples of when dignity and equity were absent for the participants, other instances also pointed to the participants experiencing discrimination. The fact that participants reported not disclosing their gender identities at various times to avoid possible negative consequences is echoed in other studies that identify a fear of what may follow such a disclosure (Effrig et al., 2011). So while the participants generally did not report experiencing

the negative consequences that they feared, such as people making derogatory comments or overtly excluding them, they were still experiencing discrimination because of their gender identities and not fitting into dominant social norms surrounding gender, which are prevalent in tertiary environments.

Gender normativity and administrative systems

Gender normativity was reported in different areas such as personal interactions and navigating administrative systems. Connected to these areas are the reported difficulties created by a lack of staff awareness when a student was in a challenging situation. The participants reported unwanted or inappropriate comments from both staff and students. Those who made the comments may not have been consciously aware that they were unwanted; however, the comments could be seen as the consequence of cisnormativity.

Cisnormativity is an aspect of our society's gender norms that underlines the assumption that everyone's gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth. Many of the unwanted comments participants reported were related to incorrect assumptions about their gender identities based on either the details on official documentation, or the perceived gender of a person in relation to how they presented themselves. Burford, MacDonald, Orchard, & Wills (2015) suggest that cisnormativity shapes all aspects of the education system. The findings of the current study indicate that many of the participants' negative experiences were a result of cisnormativity that had indeed woven its way into both the attitudes of individuals and the writing of policies and procedures in many areas. The participants reported many different examples of application forms, surveys, and curricular content that reflect only the binary model of gender. Rands (2009) describes this invisibility of diverse gender identities in these aspects of tertiary life as contributing to the oppression of diverse gender people. The participants often commented on feeling invisible or excluded when they filled out a form that asked for gender but gave only male and female as options (note that the terms thus used conflate sex and gender). In the same way, when participants encountered curricular content that does not include any examples of gender diverse people, they also felt invalidated. This invisibility within the tertiary system and administrative processes meant the participants were not treated with the same level of dignity as their cisgender peers.

Low priority for staff

Alongside reports of ineffective administration systems, the participants also reported a strong perception that staff did not consider the task of addressing these issues a priority. Staff were not seen as being proactive in ensuring those changes occurred.

Although the majority of participants reported not experiencing discrimination, when asked about the ways they believed their gender identities had affected their experiences of study, many felt that the tertiary staff paid little attention to making the changes required to create an inclusive environment for diverse gender students. This perception aligns with overseas studies that report diverse gender people feeling invisible and even ignored within most institutional structures, including within policies, curricula, and teacher training (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011).

One of the ways diverse gender identities are ignored is the lack of information about diverse gender students in teacher education programmes (Rands, 2009). When teaching staff have little awareness of gender diverse students they are more likely to create normative education cultures that perpetuate unsatisfactory environments and learning outcomes for gender diverse students (Burford, MacDonald, Orchard & Wills, 2015). Therefore, this lack of inclusion in teacher training leads to staff creating teaching and learning environments that reflect only the binary model of gender. Participants reported that the tertiary environments they were involved in were dominated by binary gender norms. The findings show that even when the staff were aware that the policies and processes were not working for diverse gender students, little was being done to rectify the situation. Participants perceived staff as paying little attention to ensuring the changes were made, often leaving the participants feeling that they were not a priority. Participants reported feeling that staff are just not aware of the importance of getting these changes made. Rankin and Beemyn (2012) state that it is staff ignorance that leads to the unintentional discrimination that occurs when policies and processes are not inclusive. This lack of staff awareness appears to contribute to the participants' perception that they are not a priority.

It may be that the relative invisibility of the diverse gender population in research also feeds this perception of not being important. Clark et al. (2014) note that in New Zealand it is

uncommon for diverse gender identities to be included in large-scale population-based surveys, and those studies that have identified diverse gender identities are undertaken on a small scale. In addition, studies including diverse gender participants often combine this group with diverse sexualities, which does not allow for a detailed study of diverse gender students' specific needs. In sum, within educational settings, there is little research to inform practice in relation to diverse gender inclusion.

In New Zealand the Human Rights Commission published a specific review of the discrimination faced by the diverse gender community, along with clear recommendations such as ensuring that diverse gender people participate in decisions that affect them, improving legal protection from discrimination, and simplifying processes for changing sex on official documents (Human Rights Commission, 2008). The report from the study was published over eight years ago, with a commitment to implement the recommendations within three years; however, many recommendations have still not been implemented. As this report is well known in the diverse gender community, the lack of change could also provide a context in which the participants feel they are not important to those in positions of influence.

This lack of progress towards inclusive environments demonstrates how the power systems backing gender norms privilege some and punish others. The cisgender majority have the power to maintain the education system in a style that meets their needs. Policies and processes within tertiary environments tend to promote and support the social norm of cisgender people being dominant, normal, and superior (Baril & Trevenen, 2014). One of the ways that policies and processes maintain dominant gender norms is through the language used in them. Language is powerful, as it instils and reinforces cultural values (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). When the participants do not see their gender identities reflected in the language of policies or curricula, they receive the unspoken message that they are not important. This experience is a common way that cisnormativity is reproduced in education and educational research (Burford, MacDonald, Orchard & Wills, 2015).

The invisibility of diverse gender identities and the perceived lack of staff motivation to address the situation create challenges for the participants as they seek to be accepted for

who they are. All participants mentioned, to varying levels, the challenges they faced in not only coming to terms with who they are but also having others accept them as they are. These experiences fit with the key milestones identified by Beemyn and Rankin (2011) as diverse gender people navigate the process of not only recognising and accepting their own gender identity but also having others acknowledge them. The participants' experiences are reflected in the findings of the human rights investigation that found diverse gender people in New Zealand struggled to live fulfilled lives as the sex they knew themselves to be (Human Rights Commission, 2008). This struggle was reported as being a result of both their own process of self-acceptance and not being accepted by others for who they are. Part of the process of self-acceptance is overcoming the shame often associated with not fitting accepted social norms (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). It could be that when the participants do not see staff being proactive about making the changes needed, that sense of shame is activated, leading to the conclusion that diverse gender people and their needs are not a priority for staff.

Minority Stress

The findings indicate that the combination of gender normativity, non-inclusive administrative processes, and a general lack of staff awareness created an environment that led to the participants experiencing minority stress.

Participants experienced their own personal values as being in conflict with those of the dominant culture. Those experiencing minority stress often conceal parts of themselves and expect to be rejected if their gender identity is revealed (Dispenza, Brown, & Chastain, 2016). Participants often reported considering what kind of clothes to wear, which bathrooms to use, and what areas of campus to move around in. This self-editing was a strategy participants reported using to avoid being rejected or challenged. These findings align with previous studies reporting a higher level of stress experienced by diverse gender students than their cisgender peers (Clark et al., 2014; Efrigg et al., 2011; Human Rights Commission, 2008).

While the findings identified clear examples of discrimination and increased stress levels, there were also many examples of healthy coping strategies that the participants had developed. The next section of this chapter will report on the personal strategies that participants

developed and the suggested institutional strategies participants believe would help to create inclusive environments.

Strategies that support inclusive practice

The findings clearly demonstrate both the personal strategies that participants have developed for succeeding as a minority population within the tertiary environment, and the importance of visibility at a structural or systemic level. The two main system areas that were highlighted are education for staff about diverse gender people and increasing the visibility of this minority population at both a policy and curricular level. Participants reported wanting to be asked their gender identities when filling out forms, to have staff that are aware that diverse gender identities exist, and to have examples of diverse gender people in the teaching materials. These findings match up with recommendations in the literature regarding creating inclusive environments. By creating environments where students feel included and respected, tertiary providers can address some of the barriers to inclusion, and therefore the ability of diverse gender students to engage and succeed is increased (Effrig et al., 2011; Rankin & Beemyn, 2012).

Participants' personal strategies

The findings show that the participants created personal strategies, including a willingness to adapt to different situations; an ability to build strong connections with trusted staff and students; and the willingness to educate others. Participants also demonstrated awareness of the importance of limiting how available they were to educate others about diverse gender people. These boundaries ensured they retained the energy required to focus on their own study. The findings reflected healthy coping strategies diverse gender people develop, such as problem solving and reframing and maximising personal strengths, in order to manage the increased anxiety related to being part of a minority group (Dispenza, Brown, & Chastain, 2016).

These strategies supported participants' personal sense of agency and their ability to move through their course of study as easily as possible. Examples are finding supportive staff who could provide curricular content relating to the diverse gender community, disclosing one's gender identity to trusted friends to create a network of support, and finding gender-neutral

bathrooms where one would not fear being challenged. These findings are similar to those of Clark et al (2014) who report on research with New Zealand high school students, which found those who developed confidence in their own abilities and strong social connections were more likely to be resilient and advance through their educational experience in a healthy way (Clark et al., 2014).

Policies and Processes

In addition to recognising the importance of developing their own healthy strategies for dealing with the challenges of being in a minority group, participants identified ways in which the dominant group can work to make changes that would support their sense of belonging and recognition. The participants reported the importance of ensuring that diverse gender identities are visible at both a policy level and within curricula. Many participants mentioned how such inclusion would promote a sense of being valued and consequently a feeling of belonging.

Burdge (2007) points to the importance of gender diverse people seeing themselves reflected in many different environments. In the current study the curriculum was mentioned as a key area of importance for students to see the inclusion of diverse gender people (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Rands, 2009). Creating this counter narrative within the educational setting is one of the ways visibility is increased. The ability to see yourself, your world view, and your values reflected in the curriculum creates visibility for diverse gender students and also provides a positive narrative about gender diverse people that increases others' awareness.

Participants also mentioned the inclusion of diverse gender identities in anti-harassment policies as a way to increase visibility and awareness. This strategy is in line with one of the recommendations from the Human Rights Commission (2008) report that gender diversity should be included in all policies that refer to the sex of a person. Although participants sometimes acknowledged the limitations of these policies, such as the inability to address microaggressions through anti-harassment policies as they did not really fit the criteria for harassment, the naming of diverse gender identities within these policies provided reassurance that protection was available if needed.

Education for staff

Although policies and processes are important, they are ineffective if a culture to support their implementation is lacking (Rankin & Beemyn, 2012). A strong theme that comes through in the findings is the importance of tertiary staff being aware of diverse gender students' needs. While the participants were willing to educate those close to them, there was an acknowledgement that the energy it takes to be in that educational role detracted from their ability to focus on their own education. The literature points to the type of education that is useful for supporting diverse gender inclusion. Rather than focusing on individual behaviours and beliefs, the suggestion is to focus on systemic issues, such as gender and cisnormativity, and to create conversations that can "hold individuals, institutions and communities accountable" (Burford et al., 2015, p. 162). This focus away from blaming individuals and instead focusing on how those with privilege (the majority) can work to create inclusive environments provides a platform for reflection and amendment of behaviour and attitudes. North (2010) states that when those in the majority take responsibility for critically reflecting on personal teaching practices, chances are better that harmful beliefs and practices do not continue.

Providing educational opportunities for staff and students is a useful strategy for tertiary institutes that wish to create inclusion for gender diverse students. This education could help to support the recognition that fluidity of thinking is required from staff and within systems. Some of the participants in this study who identified in ways other than transgender often mentioned the challenges that the fluidity of their gender identities and expression caused for others. These participants had developed language to communicate the reality of their own gender fluidity to others. Burdge (2007) describes how language relating to the diverse gender population is continually evolving and acknowledges the challenge of keeping up with the fluidity of language. This constant evolution of language highlights the importance of ongoing education to support staff and points to the complexity of ambiguous terminology along with the fluidity of gender.

The findings indicate that as the general population's awareness around gender issues develops, there is a need to develop education, both for staff and students, that challenges cisnormativity and gender transgression oppression. Rands (2009) refers to this type of education as "gender complex education" wherein gender categories are acknowledged as

fluid and reflective action is encouraged to reconstruct gender in ways that are more equitable. Fryer (2012) also acknowledges the importance of challenging the assumptions that underpin dominant norms to create social change that recognises diverse gender identities. Participants reported a desire for tertiary institutes to provide education for staff and students that reflects the complexity of gender and increases awareness of how those who transgress gender norms are repressed and silenced. This type of education would take the pressure off diverse gender students needing to provide this type of education.

The purpose of providing education for staff and students is to raise levels of consciousness around options beyond the binary gender system. The findings highlighted the importance of a range of gender identity options being available when gender was required to be recorded. Clark et al. (2014) report that including a range of terms when asking about gender such as gender diverse, whakāwahine, tangata ira tane, or fa'afafine, not only promotes a sense of inclusion for the diverse gender community, but also raises awareness for cisgender people about the existence of this population. Therefore, this strategy of including a range of gender options produces multiple benefits for tertiary institutions wishing to create inclusive environments for diverse gender students.

Overall the findings on strategies suggest that appropriate education, staff demonstrating their awareness of the diverse gender population, and the explicit inclusion of diverse gender considerations within tertiary policies and processes would enhance possibilities for authentic inclusion for this minority group.

Summary of discussion

The findings demonstrate that participants experienced discrimination within the tertiary environment because of their gender identities. This finding aligns with the literature that reports diverse gender people experiencing discrimination in all areas of life (Case et al., 2012; Clark et al., 2014; Effrig et al., 2011; Human Rights Commission, 2008; Rankin & Beemyn, 2012; Rossiter, 2014). The current study also shows that participants developed comprehensive personal strategies to manage the stress that this discrimination creates. The participants also demonstrated a clear understanding of what institutional strategies work for them, or would work if implemented. In line with the Human Rights Commission (2008) findings, the

participants in this study are not seeking any special treatment; they simply wish to be treated with the same dignity and respect that their gender conforming peers receive.

As the participants are a self-selected group, it could be assumed that they are relatively confident in speaking up, not only for themselves but also for others. It is important to recognise that not all gender diverse people will behave in the same way. The participants demonstrated a willingness to support others in their community and often shared stories of other diverse gender students' experiences within their own stories. This study provides an avenue for a group of diverse gender tertiary students to voice their experiences and participate in developing recommendations that could improve their own, and others', experiences of tertiary study. The Humans Rights Commission's report (2008) noted that it is important to recognise that diverse gender people need to be able to experience a sense of agency and the ability to participate in decisions that affect them. Strategies that provide opportunities for the voice of diverse gender students to be heard in ways that meet their needs are vital to creating inclusive environments (Burdge, 2007).

The findings of this study not only highlight where the issues lie when working to create such inclusive environments, but also highlight some potential solutions. The table below summarises the findings against the research questions and shows what kinds of discrimination were evidenced, along with suggested strategies to promote inclusion.

Table 3 Summary of findings against research questions

Research Questions	1. Do gender diverse students experience discrimination related to their gender identities within tertiary settings? If so, how does this discrimination occur?	2. What strategies support the inclusion of gender diverse students within tertiary settings?
Participant Responses	Gender normativity within tertiary systems and curricula	Inclusive policies and practices
Participant Responses	Lack of proactive initiatives from staff	Diversity education for staff
Participant Responses	Minority stress experienced	Participants' personal strategies

CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the experiences of diverse gender students in tertiary education. In particular, the study focused on whether discrimination occurred; and if it did, what kind of discrimination was occurring and what strategies would support an inclusive tertiary environment for diverse gender students. Seven current tertiary students participated in semi-structured interviews that were transcribed to provide a rich data set. At the beginning of this study I went looking for discrimination; however, by the end of the process, I realised that whilst I had uncovered many examples of discrimination, I also found strong evidence of the participants' resilience.

Four key conclusions arise from the findings of this study that connect to the research questions about discrimination and inclusive strategies. The first conclusion is related to diverse gender students themselves and the other three are related to the tertiary environment.

Gender diverse students increasingly expect to be included

Findings indicate that all the participants had a clear understanding of their right to be included within the tertiary environment. The participants had clear examples of when they felt excluded and how this problem could be resolved. The literature links this increasing demand for inclusive education to the growing refusal of the diverse gender community to accept cultural, legal, and political barriers in all areas of life (Spade, 2011). The participants demonstrated a range of skills that both created a sense of personal security for themselves and ensured others were aware of how to create inclusive environments. As gender diverse students continue to choose places where they feel secure and included it will be important for staff to increase their awareness of what this population requires.

There is a lack of staff awareness about diverse gender identities

The participants' experiences in all the tertiary environments demonstrated that staff, in general, were either not aware of how to include diverse gender people, or lacked the motivation or confidence to make the necessary changes required. Overall, staff appeared willing to hear about diverse gender students' experiences and to learn from them. However, this willingness often left diverse gender students receiving attention that separated them off from their cisgender peers. Participants talked about feeling uncomfortable when staff and other students expected them to be responsible for upskilling the cisgender population. This form of 'othering' highlights how gender diverse people do not fit the gender norms and can sometimes be seen as odd or unusual (Muhr & Sullivan, 2013). As staff increase their awareness of gender diversity they will also start to see how gender norms impact all areas of the educational environment.

Gender norms are reinforced in educational systems and in the curricula

The findings showed a lack of visibility of gender diverse people within policies and processes and clearly demonstrated how binary gender norms are woven throughout educational systems. This socialisation of gender norms is often invisible to those who conform and so they are unconsciously reinforced in both education systems and curricula (Muhr & Sullivan, 2013). The literature suggests that staff could consider how gender norms are perpetuated in the language, activities and course content (Spade, 2011). This increased awareness may provide the opportunity for staff to adjust some of the unconscious messages that have been

delivered about binary gender norms. Until these changes occur, gender norms will continue to be reinforced overtly and covertly in many aspects of tertiary education.

There is a lack of research about best practice

Within educational settings, little research informs practice in relation to diverse gender inclusion. This lack of research and debate connected to best practice for inclusivity could explain the participants' perception that there is a lack of attention being paid to their needs. Rands (2009) acknowledges the lack of research as problematic given that diverse gender people are participating in all levels of the education system. Unless tertiary providers are aware of diverse gender students' experiences, these students will continue to experience marginalisation and barriers to reaching their full potential.

Tertiary providers often make public comments about providing inclusive environments; however, there is very little research about what best practice in this area looks like. Rands (2009) states that all teacher education programmes should be designed to ensure that staff know how to support the growth of diverse gender students. This study may provide some insight for tertiary providers who are working towards inclusive practice. It is important that the focus remains on the power and privilege of the majority inherent in the educational system (gender conforming privilege) in order to avoid placing the burden of change on the diverse gender community. In this model of change instead of focussing on empowering diverse gender people to deal with the challenges gender norms create, the focus is on changing social systems to reflect gender diversity so that all can feel authentically included.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study have led to the development of four recommendations. The table below shows the links between the study findings, the conclusions, and these recommendations.

Table 4 Summary of recommendations in response to findings

Study findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
Students experiencing minority stress and the personal strategies they have developed in response	Diverse gender students increasingly expect to be included.	That tertiary providers recognise the impact that gender norms have on diverse gender students.
Lack of diversity education for staff	There is a lack of staff awareness about diverse gender identities.	That tertiary providers deliver educational programmes for staff that support the active creation of inclusive environments for diverse gender students.
Gender normativity and the lack of visibility of diverse gender identities in policies and processes	Gender norms are reinforced in administrative systems and curricula.	That institutions investigate policies, processes and curricula to ascertain areas where diverse gender identities require inclusion.
Perceived lack of support from staff for the diverse gender community	There is a lack of research about best practice.	That research scholarships be established for diverse gender researchers to support increased research within the community and create events where findings relating to diverse gender studies can be shared.

Although this study is small-scale, readers could choose to take these recommendations and transfer them to their own contexts. Whilst these recommendations focus on increasing the visibility of diverse gender people within the tertiary environment it is important to note that educational practitioners also need to protect students' right to self-determination and protect the right to remain invisible for those who wish to. Current educational institutions are still permeated with cisnormativity. Therefore, visibility does not equal safety (Burford, MacDonald, Orchard, & Wills, 2015). Visibility is not inherently good and those wishing to remain invisible have as much right to do so as those wishing to be seen. There is no easy

answer to this challenge. The ability for those in tertiary education to move with ease through the many different ways that people express themselves can sometimes be challenging.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This research has highlighted possibilities for future research. These areas are:

- Evaluating the impact of programmes that educate tertiary staff about gender diversity
- Investigating best practice for including diverse gender content in tertiary curricula
- Exploring how gender conforming privilege occurs within the teaching and learning environment
- Replicating this study on a larger scale

SUMMARY

This study documents the ways a group of diverse gender students experience discrimination within the tertiary educational environment in New Zealand. The findings are not the 'truth' for all; indeed, many of the participants' stories demonstrated as many differences as they did similarities. The study has limitations; it did not engage with the intersex community, the sample size was limited due to the scope of the project, and it is impossible to use the word 'diversity' and then expect conformity.

This thesis is seeking to provide a counter narrative to society's binary gender norms. Even though staff do not set out to silence the voices of the diverse gender community, this is the effect of the invisibility of diverse genders within the structure of education. When the status quo is maintained the diverse gender population is excluded. My hope is that the findings of this study can create avenues for those with gender conforming privilege to acknowledge their power and take actions that moves the aspirational goal of inclusivity towards reality.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INFORMATION SHEET



INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Thesis: Gender Diverse Tertiary Students in New Zealand: How to Create Inclusive Environments (working title)

My name is Catherine Powell. I am currently enrolled in the Master of Education degree in the Department of Education at Unitec Institute of Technology and seek your help in meeting the requirements of research for a Thesis course which forms a substantial part of this degree.

The aim of my project is to record the experiences of gender diverse students in New Zealand tertiary education during the last five years, specifically whether they have experienced any discrimination related to their gender identity and what strategies they believe would support the inclusion of gender diverse students in the tertiary settings. A consultation group including a range of gender identities and cultures has supported the development of this project.

I will be collecting stories from people who are over 16 years old, have studied in a New Zealand Tertiary Institute in the past 5 years (between 2010 and 2015) and self-identify within the gender diverse community. This is inclusive of but not limited to people who are intersex, trans, transsexual, transgender, takatāpui, whakāwahine, tangata ira tane, fa'afafine, akava'ine, fakaleiti, mahu, vaka sa lewa lewa, fiafifine, and genderqueer.

I request your participation in the following way:

I would appreciate being able to interview you. Due to the topics being discussed, quite a high level of personal information will be requested. It is hoped that the findings from this research project will support tertiary providers who are interested in providing inclusive environments for gender diverse students.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately 90 minutes in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish.

The interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this

study up to two weeks after receiving the final transcript without any negative consequences by advising the researcher.

There will also be the opportunity, after the first interview has been transcribed and confirmed, to reflect on my data analysis of the interview. This could be at a face-to-face meeting or by phone depending on your preference.

All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis, report or conference presentations resulting from this study. The audio recordings will be stored securely and separately from the transcribed interviews to protect your privacy. The findings from this study may also be used in conference presentations, reports and/or media releases. You will be provided with a copy of the final report. I will be asking you to sign a consent form before beginning the interview.

This research is not funded by my employer (Unitec) nor am I accountable to my employer for any of the outcomes of the research.

In the event of receiving more applications to participate than I can manage, selection criteria will be applied to ensure a wide range of gender identities, cultures and ages are included in this project.

I hope you will find this study to be of interest.

If you have any queries about the project, you may contact my supervisor at Unitec Institute of Technology: Helen Gremillion, Phone: (09) 815 4321 ext 5137 Email: hgremillion@unitec.ac.nz

Yours sincerely



Cathie Powell

catherinepowell2014@gmail.com

021 118 1951

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2015-1053

This study has been approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee from 20th August 2015 to 19th August 2016. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Gender Diverse Tertiary Students in New Zealand: How to Create Inclusive Environments

Please find below the general areas and questions I am planning on asking during our 90 minute conversation.

My contact details are at the bottom if you have any questions prior to the interview.

You are welcome to bring notes and/or a support person if that is helpful for you.

Opening questions:

Name, pronoun, gender identity, what you studied and where

Purpose of their tertiary study:

Thinking back to before you applied....

How did you feel about beginning your study?

Why did you want to enrol in tertiary study?

What was it that you wanted to achieve?

How would you know you had been successful?

Experiences of discrimination:

Can you tell me about your experiences of starting to study?

Did you experience any kind of discrimination due to your gender identity?

How did you feel about your experiences?

What are the key things that stand out for you?

Did your (*insert identity stated*) identity affect your experience of tertiary education? If so, how?

How did staff treat you?

How did students treat you?

Strategies for inclusive practice:

Was there anything that made you feel comfortable?

Who supported you? What did they do?

What strengths/skills/strategies helped you achieve your goals?

Do you feel like you succeeded?

Closing comments:

Do you have suggestions/recommendations for tertiary providers about changes that could be made?

Is there anything else you would think might be helpful?

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM



CONSENT FORM - ADULTS

DATE:

TO: Catherine Powell

FROM:

RE: Master of Education

THESIS TITLE: Gender Diverse Tertiary Students in New Zealand: How to Create Inclusive Environments (working title)

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research and I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered. I understand that neither my name nor the name of my organisation will be used in any public reports. I also understand that I will be provided with a transcript (or summary of findings if appropriate) for checking before data analysis is started and that I may may decide to withdraw from this study up to two weeks after receiving the final transcript without any negative consequences by advising the researcher.

I agree to take part in this project.

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2015-1053

This study has been approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee from 20th August 2015 to 19th August 2016. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

APPENDIX D: INITIAL CODES USED IN THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Individual Discrimination ID	Systemic discriminations SD	Participant response PR	Participant – emotions PE	Strategies – education provider SEP	Strategies – student SS
Impacted by societal attitudes and behaviours ID SA	Invisible SD I	Coming out PR CO	Don't do things due to fear of future consequences PE FFC	Safe space to go and feel comfortable SEP SSP	Social connections/friends SS SC
Inappropriate comments from others ID IC	Admin processes are hard SD AP	Younger generation more accepting PR YGA	I don't care – survival strategy PE IDC	Teaching staff support SEP TS	Willingness to educate others SS W2E
Microaggressions ID MA	Bathrooms SD B	Freedom to be me PG F2B	Aware that prejudices and discrimination does occur – on guard/ready/high alert PE OHA	Relationship Building SEP RB	Taking a leadership role SS L
Labels ID L	Names, pronouns and gender SD NPG	Wanting acceptance from others PR AFO	Shame – connected to family members PE SH	General awareness of diversity SEP AOD	Self-Awareness SS SA
Discrimination from gay white men ID GWM	Not seen as an urgent issue for staff SD NU	Caitlin Jenner – privileged perspective PR PP	Hiding hurt /feelings PE HH	Queer groups SEP QG	Self-Preservation SS SP

Staff Ignorance ID SI	Students educating teachers SD SET	Clothing is important PR C	Confidence impacted Negatively PE CIN	Allies SEP A	Boundaries SS B
	No formal complaint made SD NFCM	Choosing when to share/where to go PR W2G		Name Change SEP NC	
		Editing self PR ES		Anti-discrimination policies SEP ADP	
		Tiring PR T		Scholarships SEP S	
		Purpose for study PR P4S			
		Pronouns PR P			
		How participants see gender identity PR GI			



Full name of author: Catherine Powell

Full title of thesis/dissertation/research project:

A place to stand: Creating inclusive environments for diverse gender tertiary students

Degree: Master of Education

Year of presentation 2016

I agree to my thesis being lodged in the Unitec Library (including being available for inter-library loan), provided that due acknowledgement of its use is made. I consent to copies being made in accordance with the Copyright Act 1994.

and

I agree that a digital copy may be kept by the Library and uploaded to the institutional repository and be viewable worldwide.

Signature of author:

C. Powell

Date: 5th November 2016