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TEACHING TRANS*: STRATEGIES AND TENSIONS OF TEACHING GENDER IN STUDENT AFFAIRS PREPARATION PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	The purpose of this article is to outline a pedagogical framework we as trans* educators utilize to center trans* identities and epistemologies in classrooms alongside graduate students.
Background	Little has been written about the experiences of trans* educators in classroom spaces, in particular how gender mediates pedagogical approaches.
Methodology	This article is conceptual in nature, and as such, does not draw on any particular methodology. Instead, we draw from our ongoing experiences as trans* educators in the classroom.
Contribution	Due to the lack of theorizing or empirical work about trans* educators in classroom spaces, this article serves as an entry point into thinking what we as authors describe as ‘teaching trans*.’
Findings	This article is broken into three theoretical components: teaching <i>as</i> trans*, teaching <i>about</i> trans*, and teaching <i>with</i> trans* epistemologies.
Recommendations for Practitioners	Through this article, we as authors encourage practitioners to be aware of how gender is always already present in all spaces, including in classrooms. Thus, it becomes incumbent upon practitioners to use expansive notions of gender through pedagogical strategies, materials, and praxis.
Recommendation for Researchers	This article promotes a deeper understanding of how one’s gender identity, expression, and/or embodiment mediates and can enhance classroom teaching. While this article starts to address an under-theorized and under-researched area of study, more should be done to address how gender influences pedagogy.

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- Impact on Society Due to the omnipresence of gender binary thinking, this article has implications not just for classroom spaces, but for student affairs graduate preparation programs, as well as society writ large.
- Future Research This article opens the door for further research into student resistance to trans* and gender nonconforming educators' pedagogy.
- Keywords gender, trans* pedagogy, higher education, student affairs, classroom

INTRODUCTION

As educators in a graduate higher education and student affairs (HESA) program, our students will graduate and go on to take administrative roles within higher education. They will help shape policy and assist in undergraduate students' learning. Our students, who are at both the masters and doctoral levels, will largely influence student experience at various postsecondary institutions across the nation. It is our responsibility to prepare them to work with a growing diverse student population, to assist students in everything from senses of belonging to academic success, and to ensure students persist in higher education.

Our field is guided by 10 competency areas outlined by ACPA: College Student Educators International and NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, further supported by The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) (ACPA & NASPA, 2015). These competencies range from assessment and evaluation to student learning and development. Sectioned into three proficiency levels (i.e., basic, intermediate, and advanced) these areas help guide ideas about what makes an effective practitioner within HESA. In particular, one of the competencies, Social Justice and Inclusion, outlines the importance of individuals in the field as having "the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to create learning environments that foster equitable participation of all groups while seeking to address and acknowledge issues of oppression, privilege, and power" (p. 14). As such, social justice, inclusion, and knowledge of power and privilege are key dispositions our students must have.

In addition to the ACPA and NASPA competencies, several researchers have documented that diversity, including gender, must be a key component of HESA preparation programs (Flowers & Howard Hamilton, 2002; Gaston Gayles & Turner Kelly, 2007; Pope & Reynolds, 1997; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). Yet, despite the scholarship on the importance of including diversity and social justice, there continues to be a gap in how these topics, in this case gender, should be taught and included within these professional programs. Moreover, while there is a gap in the "how" to include gender, there is a further silence regarding how trans* topics are discussed in these professional programs. Importantly, we take up the term "trans*" as a means to include a spectrum of gender identities that transgress, cross, or otherwise blur normative notions of gender. Ostensibly, teaching about gender as well as systems of oppression is not a new idea in student affairs, per the research. Yet, to date, little has been written about how gender, and more specifically trans* topics are (not) addressed with future HESA professionals, what strategies have been and should be used, and general pedagogical strategies for educating future HESA professionals about gender.

The purpose of this article is to outline a pedagogical framework we utilize to center trans* identities and epistemologies in the classroom. We first share our own individual experiences and then provide the framework, teaching as, about, and with trans* epistemologies. We conclude with pedagogical practices to illustrate ways in which educators can use this model in their own teaching.

FINDING OUR PEDAGOGY

As two trans* identified HESA educators, we wonder, theorize, and think about the inclusion of gender within our own HESA program, as well as the general landscape of HESA programs. Working in the same program, we are two faculty members who teach students in several foundational courses in the program. As educators, we have sought out research about trans* topics, pedagogy,

and classroom management to inform our teaching praxis. While we recognize the breadth of research outlining the importance of including social justice and diversity topics into HESA programs, we have found very little that centers our own experiences as trans* educators and people in higher education.

In their introduction to a new academic journal, *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, Stryker and Currah (2014) write that the field of transgender studies, as well as the journal, offer much possibility because, in many cases for the first time in academic spaces:

Transgender people (self-identified or designated as such by others) can be subjects of knowing as well as objects of knowledge...they can articulate critical knowledge from embodied positions that would otherwise be rendered pathological, marginal, invisible, or unintelligible with dominant and normative organizations of power/knowledge. (p. 9)

What is striking for us about Stryker and Currah's statement is how much possibility it provides us and how much it speaks to our experiences. In so many ways, we have been cast as the subject/object, but in a negative manner. If we are the subject of information or conversations, it has been about bathrooms, locker rooms, and issues of safety. Our bodies have been used as objects, ones where we have been pathologized and medicalized as deficient, abnormal, and abject. We are asked questions about biomedical transitions, as if all we are is our chromosomal makeup (and apparent desire to change that). We have been tokenized when we are asked to attend meetings to provide the "transgender" or "gay" perspective, often conflating sexuality with gender expression. Our voices and experiences are often interrupted and silenced.

Yet, as Stryker and Currah write, being trans* can produce key and critical knowledges. For us, being trans* has been an either/or experience: we are either hyper-visible and tokenized or invisible and silenced. We have been either subjects or objects, but allowed no voice. Instead, Stryker and Currah give us hope that we can engage in a both/and perspective, particularly in our pedagogy. While we often cannot change the tokenism, silencing, or the hyper-visibility and invisibility, in our classrooms, we can be critical knowledge producers. In essence, both the field of transgender studies and its corresponding journal *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* offered possibility for a "both/and" approach: we can carve out key spaces and be both subjects and objects of knowledge, we can give perspectives and experiences and critique and engage in knowledge production from our embodied positions. We can push back on the negative subject/object notion using our pedagogy. For us, it is this possibility that Stryker and Currah discuss that informs our teaching.

We detail in this piece what we call "teaching trans*," a moniker that offers how we teach to, about, and through gender in a graduate HESA program. Here, we offer our description of what "teaching trans*" is, what it affords, and how this pedagogical philosophy gives us possibility and rich experiences learning alongside our students in and out of the classroom. In the autoethnographic tradition, we then use our particular, localized experiences to trace the intertwined realities of self (i.e., us as researchers) and the culture in which we are embedded (i.e., the HESA field) (Chang, 2008; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Our process for writing this article consisted of ongoing dialogic conversations (Jones, Kim, & Skendall, 2012) about our experiences of shared/similar events (e.g., teaching classes in the same program, attending similar meetings). We engaged in storytelling with each other (Homan Jones, 2005), describing our experiences and provided narratives that discussed ways in which gender mediated our experiences in and out of the classroom.

TEACHING TRANS*

Teaching future HESA professionals, as trans* educators, we have engaged in "teaching trans*," a pedagogical model we have designed to conceptualize our pedagogy. It serves to conceptualize how we facilitate student learning, increase trans* representations and knowledges, and center our own experiences. With "teaching trans*," we do not merely mean teaching to or about individuals who identify within the umbrella or as trans*. For us, "teaching trans*" is bigger than that. Rather, "teach-

ing trans*” is a pedagogical approach that consists of three primary parts: teaching *as*, teaching *about*, and teaching *with* trans* epistemologies. For us, “teaching trans*” holds the tensions of who we are and who we are seen to be, how we operate in the academy, and how to engage in learning.

We conceptualize “teaching trans*” as a type of scavenger pedagogy. We borrow from Halberstam’s (1998) notion of queer methodology, described as “a scavenger methodology that uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behavior” (p. 13). While Halberstam discusses this “scavenger methodology” as one that assists in research, we take it up here as one that we use in teaching. For us, “teaching trans*” insists that we scavenge from the far reaches of scholarship, the peripheries of media, and pull from a wide range of disciplines. It is an attempt at cobbling together from a variety of areas a pedagogy that is our own: one that centers trans* bodies, voices, and experiences. As such, our pedagogy is transdisciplinary. We pull from Queer Theory, Poststructuralism, Postmodernism, Feminism, Critical Race Theory, Critical Trans Politics, and Intersectionality. Because canonical texts rarely include us, our materials supersede the canon and often consist of zines, comics, music, and art. By design, our materials come from less-cited scholars and, often, personal narratives. In short, “teaching trans*” means to scavenge disciplines, media, and scholarship in an effort to represent the voices of those who are most on the margins (hooks, 1990; Spade, 2015).

Prior to outlining our three tenets of “teaching trans*,” however, we find it imperative to discuss our relationship with each other. Far from being a form of navel-gazing, we find our positionality together to be both unique and important. Specifically, as two trans* scholars teaching in the same program at the same institution, we are afforded a possibility many—regardless of gender—do not have: the ability to not be “the only one.” We have been able to cultivate a sense of community with each other at our host institution that many trans* academics are only able to have in sporadic moments and locations (e.g., academic conferences) or via virtual kinship networks (Nicolazzo, 2017b). While we experience our trans* identities differently, we have the ability to discuss and process how our trans*ness is un/made *in situ*, a privilege we do not take for granted. Mirroring our previous conversation regarding hyper-/invisibility, we also cannot underestimate the ways our various other in/visible identities mediate our experiences. Specifically, the ways in which we continue to experience our shifting identities in relation to our being trans* is vastly important to how we “teach trans*.” Finally, our both being White, and our continued commitment to undermining White supremacy in and beyond the academy, is critically important to our ongoing development of “teaching trans*” as a pedagogical intervention. In other words, we view “teaching trans*” as a strategy by which to interrogate oppressive illogics in, through, and beyond a single-axis perspective on gender. We now turn to elaborating on “teaching trans*.”

TEACHING AS TRANS*

All forms of identity are complex, and ours, at least our gender expressions and gender identities, are often times confounding to others. We believe it is important to share these complexities and experiences with our students. As such, we engage in feminist self-disclosure (Beck, 1983), a pedagogical tool that personalizes the instructor in an attempt to lessen “the student-teacher hierarchy” in addition to providing “opportunity to validate diversity and difference” (p. 162). According to Beck, self-disclosure offers educators to position themselves as knowers. That is, we are upfront with our students with our identities, sharing with them experiences (both positive and negative) in an effort to illustrate the complexities of how gender can be navigated. For us, it is imperative that our students learn about our complexities, as much of how we know and what we know comes from how we have been gendered. For us, this self-disclosure centers our bodies as, according to Shaprio (1999) “any approach committed to human liberation must seriously address the body as a site for both oppression and liberation” (p. 18). It has consistently been our bodies that have been mocked, made invisible, and policed. Our bodies have consistently been object. But, for us, we use our bodies instead as a means for knowledge and knowledge production, and in our teaching. As outlined by Darder

(2009), our bodies are primary in our teaching because they “constitute primacy in our material relationships with the word. Without considering the materiality of the body, all notions of teaching and learning are reduced to mere abstraction” (p. 217). Whether we address it or not, our trans* bodies are always already being un/made in classroom spaces. As such, we cannot pretend our very materiality is beyond discussion. Regardless of how our trans*ness is inscribed on our bodies, we find our very bodily presence in classroom spaces to be an important moment of disruption, one in which we can “work the weaknesses of the norm” regarding gender (Butler, 2011, p. 181).

Because we conceptualize our teaching as also learning alongside our students, we self-disclose and share with students not just who we are, but the larger implications of who we are. For example, I (Katy) shared with my students how much I struggled in my undergraduate program. I only lived in the residence halls for a semester because it was an unsafe place for me as a queer college student. I was assigned to live in an all women’s residence hall, because according to all my documentations, I was “female.” Yet, I was coded (due to my mannerisms) as masculine. The residence hall was a place I did not want to be and tried very hard to avoid. After the first semester, I moved off campus where I was less engaged and my grades suffered because of it. I had less engagement with my faculty, but it was decidedly safer. My undergraduate experience was not a great one and that had implications for how I (did not) engage in my academic experiences. I share this with my students, particularly ones who work in residential life, to provide them an example of the lasting affects unsafe and chilly climates can have for students. Thus, teaching as trans*, for us, takes seriously the tensions we are forced to embrace about our gender identities as well as how we are coded inside and outside of the academy. For us, this is our attempt at foregrounding trans* as subject: we put forth ourselves in an attempt to help students better understand that gender is more than an identity, it mediates everything from experience to academic success (Nicolazzo, 2017b).

We are, however, also critical of self-disclosure as hooks (1994) and others continue to be. Importantly, for us, we do not really have a choice to self-disclose. Because we visually eschew the binary, we are immediately coded as being “different” in regards to our gender. For instance, I (Katy) am simultaneously accused of being both too trans* and not trans* enough. With broad, masculine shoulders and a high, feminine voice, I am something of a gender-trader. I am too masculine to be a woman, too feminine to be a man. I identify as a non-binary, gender queer individual. I am typically coded (until I speak) as a man. Often, in brief encounters with other individuals, I am first addressed using masculine nouns and pronouns (sir, he/him/his) until I speak, where I often will get sincere apologies. In department meetings, I am feminized and often asked to take notes and do tertiary service. My students find me compassionate and caring, and I am often labeled their cheerleader. I suspect they find my approaches safe and maternal. They code me as a lesbian; they see me as a woman in men’s clothes who is married to another woman.

For me (Z), I have often wondered—and worried—about how my trans* femininity does not appear on my body. As someone who is often coded as a man due to my voice, facial hair, and musculature, I have struggled with how to show up to class in a way that allows me to be comfortable and seen on my own terms. I, too, am caught between the “too much/not enough” trap, as I have had students share that my trans* identity was distracting to their education as well as students and colleagues who just see me as an effeminate gay man. In response to the various ways my trans*ness is un/made, I have often contemplated wearing my breastforms when I teach, and have had various conversations about wearing dresses and skirts to class. I am continually reminded that, as Reina Gossett (2015) stated, “After so long, and so much work, it’s still so fucking hard to be a public woman” (para. 24). Even though I know who I am, I often struggle with being unraveled in the classroom. For if our trans* identities are relational (Jourian, 2016; Nicolazzo, 2017b; Simmons, 2016), then in many respects, “I am whatever [students] say I am” (Eminem, 2000). Despite this, I have continued to remind myself that my trans*ness is a gift (Nicolazzo, 2015), and one that not everyone gets the privilege to experience in the same ways. In other words, I continue to resist the normative ways in which I am pressured to show up as a “public [trans*] woman,” as well as what my showing up differently

says—or does not say—about me as a trans* educator. I also do not shy away from sharing these reflections with students and broader publics, as I use my blog and Twitter account—which students follow—to explore these various experiences.

Our self-disclosure also ensures that we can define our identity on our own terms. For us, not only is it a learning tool to disclose who we are, but also a means at self-preservation. We discuss our identities in the hopes that students will not just learn about gender complexity, but also about our humanity.

Given that our lived realities affect much of how we navigate the academy, our own teaching, and how we produce knowledge, we feel that teaching trans* is essential to how we teach and how we show up in academic spaces. We hold both our experiences and our teaching up alongside each other. For us, not only can they not be separate, we feel our students can recognize our humanity, our experiences, and build relationships with us. Moreover, our knowledges and experiences can be used, discussed, and offered to our students to add to their learning.

TEACHING ABOUT TRANS*

While we teach as trans*, we also center and teach about trans* with our students. Often, trans* bodies have been excluded in articles, textbooks, narratives, and educational materials. If trans* bodies have been included, they have often been medicalized or constructed as deficit models to pity. In canonical curricula, trans* bodies have existed in debates around bathrooms (Farrington, 2016) and student housing (Kortegast, 2017; Nicolazzo & Marine, 2015). These materials and discussions have often taken on the tone of “where do we put *them*” or “what do we do with *this population*,” serving to simultaneously center cisgender narratives of trans* bodies as deficits (i.e., *them, this population, those people*) and pushing trans* voices to the periphery (Nicolazzo, 2017a).

Given the historical treatment of trans* bodies, voices, and experiences, we feel it is critical to center trans* bodies and voices as much as possible. Rather than having a “unit” or “week” that discusses gender (and adding a reading or two about trans* individuals) we attempt to center trans* individuals and topics in all discussions and throughout the entire semester. For instance, in all my classes, I (Katy) will use Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a tool to push back on speech acts in the reading materials and texts. I teach my students about how language is a social action (Halliday, 1993) and how phrases and ideas are worded influence and (re)present truth. Examining how media uses language and semiotics can reveal how language serves to shape, present, and (re)present lived experiences. Those who serve to monitor language use in media, particularly as it pertains to how gender is portrayed, have found that “media tend to represent reality in ways that most benefit those in positions of power in society in a process of hegemonic reproduction and maintenance of the status quo” (Ross & Carter, 2011, p. 1152). This practice of examining language as a system of power highlights whose voices are heard and whose voices are obscured and just as importantly, what topics are centered (i.e., bathrooms, safety) and what topics are largely silent (resilience, experiences of trans* students of color). As such, examining how language is used can indicate how power is wielded in textual form. I require students to bring in articles and other forms of media that serve to (re)present trans* students’ experiences in higher education. In teaching students about how language is used, for instance passive voice, improper terminology, the naming and not naming of social identity, encourages students to read with a critical eye and to be aware of how language is being used to shape experiences and stories.

I (Z) often frontload my classes with critical perspectives and epistemologies that center liberatory gender-based analyses. That is, rather than waiting for the end of term to discuss gender-expansive positionalities and subjectivities as a “future consideration” for HESA professionals, I introduce these from the start of classes as a framework through which students and I can critique that which is held as canon for our field. For example, I have often used primers on Critical Race Theory, Critical Disability Studies, and Critical Trans Politics as readings during the first week of classes. With

these knowledges, I then invite students to imagine new possibilities for the theoretical concepts and practical applications of the work with which we will engage throughout the term. In other words, rather than going right to the HESA cannon, I center those knowledges written for and by trans* people as a strategy to implode the twin cultural realities of gender binary discourse and compulsory heterogenderism (Nicolazzo, 2017b) in which HESA—as a field of study and practice—is steeped.

TEACHING WITH TRANS* EPISTEMOLOGIES

Not only is teaching trans* embodied (i.e., teaching *as* trans*) and content-driven (i.e., teaching *about* trans*), but it is also epistemological. In other words, how trans* people come to think and know our worlds is a vital, albeit largely unexplored, topic worthy of consideration in HESA graduate programs. Here, we center trans* ways of knowing, a type of double-consciousness of how we engage in the social world and how we are expected to engage. Centering trans* epistemologies means honoring the “both/and” world we inhabit: we are both subjects and objects and as such, we bring (as do other trans* individuals) key knowledges and experiences. Furthermore, grounding our work as HESA-based faculty in trans* epistemologies has the potential to undo more than just gender normative thinking, but multiple repressive illogics in our field (e.g., anti-Black racism; Patton, 2016). For as Enke (2012) surmised, “Gender may trouble every imaginable social relation” (p. 1).

Not only can we use trans* knowledges to frame courses—as discussed in the previous section—but our courses can be spaces through which we come to trans* knowledges. In other words, through our “teaching trans*,” we can come to new trans*-centered ways of knowing, ways that we can then use to continue the project of expanding notions of what, how, when, and where gender can exist. For example, I (Z) have used the teaching of a student development theory class to imagine what a trans* epistemology in postsecondary education could look, sound, and feel like (Nicolazzo, 2017a). As I wrote, “. . .imagining a trans* epistemology moves one beyond just the mere recognition of trans* bodies, but embraces a trans*-centered ethic of approaching knowledge creation and the world in which that knowledge is used to transform society toward liberatory ends” (p. 19). In other words, trans* epistemologies—created in and through the very classes we teach—are a clarion call for all HESA educators—faculty and administrators alike—to think alongside those most on the margins as a way to envision postsecondary environments as a “practice of freedom” (hooks, 1994). Simply put: how we think, and how we come to know, begets our ability to engage in liberatory world-making (Lugones, 1987) in and beyond the academy.

I (Katy) center student experiences by borrowing from Cherríe Moraga’s (1982) essay, “La Güera,” which holds that theorizing should come “from the flesh,” (p. 34). In her essay, Moraga discusses how women experience “racism, as experienced in the flesh, as revealed in the flesh of their writing” (p. 34). Centering “the flesh,” holds “that theory-making also resides in the flesh” (Benmayor, 2008, p. 189). I ask students to engage in reflection, digital storytelling, and other activities that center their experiences and their bodies. As Benmayor (2008) writes, having students engage in this type of reflection and digital storytelling allows “an active learning process that engages the cultural assets, experiences and funds of knowledge that students bring to the classroom” (p. 189). These activities allow students to “produce new social/cultural/historical understandings” (p. 189) about themselves and their experiences. In this way, I ask students to reflect upon their experiences, ways in which their bodies, their flesh, have been treated, relegated to particular activities/spaces, and ways in which systems have privileged and obscured their bodies. The knowledge produced from these activities then becomes centered.

PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES IN THE CLASSROOM

As we have signaled, to teach trans* is to transgress theoretical, pedagogical, and practical applications and understandings of gender in HESA graduate programs. While we have discussed theoretical and practical applications, we have yet to elucidate fully our pedagogical practices of teaching trans*. In an effort to include our bodies, experiences, and engage in meaningful relationships with

our students, our philosophy requires that we use literature, media, and non-canonical materials to center those trans* people, experiences, and knowledges most on the margins. Additionally, we view these pedagogical practices as interventions against the ongoing systemic racism (Ahmed, 2016), colonization (Driskill, 2016), ableism (Clare, 2017), and classism (Nicolazzo, 2017b) that are intertwined with and further propagate trans* oppression.

CLASSROOM MATERIALS AND READINGS

As with most educators, a large portion of our pedagogical focus goes into curriculum and curriculum planning. For us, it is often not as simple as choosing canonical texts for our students. Instead, because we center trans* experiences, most of the textbooks available do not include us. While we often see a few pages (or a special section in a text) offered to transgender experiences, largely, we have found that these texts often center the experiences of White trans* individuals who both wish to and have the ability to biomedically transition. Even in articles we pull for our students, there is an overwhelming presence of whiteness and the medicalization of trans* identities.

Moreover, when transgender subjects are discussed, it is often within a deficit model. Statistics litter the readings, discussing issues of assault, harassment, and a lack of persistence for trans* students. While these are important issues for our own students to learn about, we find that discussions within canonical texts include trans* topics as a tertiary, deficit model. Trans* students, in these texts, are victims. If there is mention of resilience strategies, they are typically notes for future considerations of yet-to-be-conducted research.

To counteract the silences in canonical texts, I (Katy) utilize comics, films, blogs, Instagram, and other forms of social media as central texts. While my students are also reading textbooks and articles, I supplement their “scholarly” reading with “non-scholarly” work in an attempt to introduce topics and ideas into the classroom that our textbooks and readings do not. I also ask students to supply key artifacts for the class’ curriculum. For instance, students are asked to take pictures of their campus to bring to class. We discuss these as texts and analyze ways in which feelings of belonging occur and do not occur. In essence, we use students’ campuses as a backdrop to better understand everything from environmental issues to policy.

In response to this, I (Z) have decided to eschew canonical texts in multiple courses. For instance, I have decided not to use *Student Development in College* in my student development theory class, a text that is largely heralded as cannon and lovingly referred to as “the book” by many in HESA. Although I appreciate the efforts undertaken by the editors to reimagine the text in its third iteration, I remain worried that it does not center fully the knowledges and experiences of those who are most on the margins, and continues to forward white, masculinist, colonialist, ableist, and gender and sexuality-normative theories. As such, I will offer it as a reference, but have committed to using primary sources that are all or mostly written by and about marginalized communities, including trans* people, and that have been published in the past five years. In so doing, I will invite students to imagine how we can come to know in ways that decenter Whiteness, cis-normativity, and compulsory able-bodiedness. Better put, I will invite students to reimagine how we approach our work as educators in HESA through marginalized epistemologies and alongside marginalized peoples and populations. We also do this through our scholarship by citing and centering various (non-)academic sources written by and for trans* people. My approach, then, assumes a “trickle up” (Spade, 2015) approach to education in that if we learn about and alongside those who are most on the margins, we can envision liberatory environments that work for all students, staff, and faculty in postsecondary education.

Assignments

In an effort to expand upon students’ understandings of the complexities of gender, particularly as it pertains to colleges and universities, we also employ a variety of assignments. Often in HESA graduate programs, students are asked to complete large research papers that focus in on a central topic from the course. These papers are often ones that require students to pull from only “scholarly

sources” that are peer-reviewed. While there is an increase in trans* representation in scholarly literature, often times peer-reviewed literature serves to only (re)present gender binary. As such, we will often use different types of assignments to encourage students to think more critically about gender in higher education.

With this in mind, I (Katy) use many arts-based assignments. For instance, in my U.S. College Students course, when teaching my students about the impact of campus environments, I have students complete an art audit or a visual diversity audit. This assignment asks students to interrogate and analyze the visual representations and messages of art on campus. I ask students to analyze visuals on campus to better understand institutional messages of who belongs here, who is the campus designed for, and what institutional messages are being sent visually? Students are asked to create maps of campus and other visual displays to indicate where some students go and where some students do not go, ultimately examining how certain groups of students can or cannot participate in and on campus. These activities allow for students to take an active role on campus, analyze ways in which campuses foster and hinder student growth, and provide students an opportunity to view “campus as place” (Jaekel, in press) through multiple points of view.

In my (Z) Gender and Higher Education course, I also use various different assignments to explore the ongoing complexities of students’ lived gendered experiences. One such assignment is what I called a Gender Journal, in which students write a series of entries based on given prompts throughout the term. The opening journal prompt asks students to reflect on their own relationship with gender, while the final prompt asks students to discuss how they will use what they have learned in their personal and professional lives. All subsequent journal entries invite students to respond to one seemingly simple prompt: how have the previous readings and conversations influenced your thinking about gender in higher education? This assignment not only reflects the iterative nature of learning, but also the iterative nature of gender as a social, political, and embodied phenomenon. In other words, I shaped the assignment as a means to help students across gender identities recognize and get acquainted with *gender as a becoming*, or the notion that our genders are always already unfolding rather than being some immutable, natural, or fixed “fact” (Garner, 2015).

THE ROLE OF FEELINGS IN THE CLASSROOM

Another key component of teaching trans* means inviting feelings—often positioned as dangerous and unworthy of time in the neoliberal academy—into the classroom. This means focusing on the *process* of learning rather than just the content of the material. For us, because we offer information about ourselves, invite students to theorize from the flesh, and because we use materials that center topics about bodies and experiences, it is important for us to check in with students about their feelings and how they encounter the material. We welcome discussions about their discomfort, their feelings of frustration, and feelings of empathy. For us, our classrooms are not objective spaces that are devoid of emotions; instead, we believe that future HESA professionals recognize the impact emotions play in their work and in the lives of students they will work with. During our class sessions, it is common to spend time discussing students’ reactions and feelings as they read materials, viewed films and visuals, and discuss their process of how they consumed this information.

Our goals of centering feelings in the classroom open space for students to discuss their actual process of what it was like to read and/or view the material and complete their degrees. For instance, I (Katy) was teaching a class of doctoral students who had been working for years on their dissertations. All of the students identified as women and, the majority of the women were middle-aged women who had juggled careers, children, and their doctorates. On the first day of class, most of the students indicated that they were tired. They were tired because they had not finished, tired because they had been told by so many that they did not belong, and that they should quit. On that first day, I gave students note cards and told them to write down all the messages that they had been given about not belonging or not finishing their degree. After they wrote on their note cards, I asked

the students to rip up the cards and throw them away. I hoped that this attempt at centering their feelings of not belonging would help them move past the doubt that had been placed onto them.

The students took this exercise to the next level; they ripped up the note cards, placed them in the center of the classroom, stomped on them, yelled at the ripped up pieces of paper, and gleefully threw them out because, “those comments were trash.” I imagine that anyone walking past that classroom on that morning was perplexed at the sight of middle-aged women stomping on pieces of paper, yelling “no” at the ripped up messages. But that class set the tone for the semester, allowed the women to recognize that feelings play a large role in their education, and that we must center those feelings in order to learn. I engaged in this exercise, and others like it, I have experienced messages that I, too, did not belong in the academy, did not belong in the classroom, and was actively told that I should avoid teaching because of how I “looked.” I knew how much messages that indicate who belongs and who does not belong in higher education affect persistence. My experiences of a trans* person has allowed me to recognize the power of feelings and the importance of empowering and validating that students belong.

This past spring, I (Z) taught a class titled Equity, Inclusion, and Social Justice in Higher Education. During one class, I showed the film “Precious Knowledge” (Palos & McGinnis, 2011), a documentary about high school students resisting Arizona state legislators’ enactments of xenophobic and jingoistic laws related to the Tucson Unified School Districts La Raza Studies program. Although the film always makes me cry, I did not expect that, after the film ended and I turned on the lights in the classroom again, I would see a handful of students crying alongside of me. At that moment, I asked students to do a quick two minute free writing exercise where they wrote down what they were feeling, after which I decided the best thing to do was to take our customary mid-class break. During this break, a few students—two Latina students and one White genderqueer student—came up to me and thanked me for showing the film. When our break ended, I engaged all students in a conversation about their feelings in response to the film, which then led into their feelings addressing issues of equity, inclusion, and social justice in the highly normative environment of higher education and student affairs. I then reminded students of Ahmed’s (2017) notion that being wound up about inequities may cause us to snap, but in that snapping, we are brought together with others who feel similarly, and this coming together was meaningful. As a trans* person who has often felt alone, and feels increasingly isolated and fearful of public spaces due to the current sociopolitical climate for trans* people, recognizing feelings as a way to commune with others who snap due to inequities has become an important component of my teaching trans*.

TENSIONS

While we have found this pedagogy, “teaching trans*,” to be inclusive of our experiences and as a means to teach more about gender, we have experienced complications, too. Below, we discuss some of these tensions. In so doing, we point to how trans* oppression in HESA programs continues to shape our experiences as trans* educators as problematic. As Ahmed (2014) wrote, “When you expose a problem you pose a problem” (para. 1). The tensions we discuss below are ways in which the problems we expose as a result of teaching trans* is posed as our being problems.

Unrewarded labor and uses of our bodies

Connected to the use of our trans* bodies (and knowledges), our labor often goes unrewarded on campus. In fact, as I (Z) have written about, I experience more rewards for my labor off-campus than at our host institution (Nicolazzo, 2017c). Again remembering Ahmed’s (2014) commentary about being a problem by pointing out problems, we have both had our bodies (of knowledge) consumed by the very same people—and at the very same time—who would rather not reward us for the work we do. For example, both of us were asked to serve on a presidential commission for gender and sexuality on campus. Although we have served in this organization for two years, we have never been called upon for our expertise as queer and trans* people who do queer and trans* schol-

arship. In fact, our doing queer and trans* scholarship, and our living our values of calling out oppressive ideologies and not capitulating to the practices that would further consume our and other queer peoples' narratives on campus, has made us dangerous in the minds of our fellow commissioners. Our being dangerous manifested most recently in the commission passing up another national expert and me (Z) on LGBTQ experiences for leadership positions. Instead, the commission membership voted in two cisgender, heterosexual people as a way to consolidate and reproduce cis-normativity and compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980). And yet, we both must continue to do labor (e.g., service to the institution) for our ability to be considered for tenure. The paradoxical relationship between what we must do and how we are continually unrewarded for what we must do is confusing at the least, and quite violent at the worst. The message we were sent is that they wanted symbolically our bodies in that space, but not to hear about our experiences or knowledges we have regarding trans* topics and research.

In addition, over the course of our tenures, we have both felt the tug and pull of our bodies being used. For various reasons, both of us feel incredibly indebted to our host institution for taking a chance and hiring us both. However, we also know that our being hired is an act of consumption through which we become the literal embodiment of “diversity and inclusion” on campus. We are the people through which institutional values are lived, and we are the people to whom others can quite literally point to and show how welcoming our campus is. However, this pointing and this use of our bodies only makes us feel more abject and out of place. That is, by being given a place, we are made to feel out of place. Similar to Ahmed's (2012) meditation on being the only brown person in a “sea of whiteness,” our trans*ness is often intensely noticeable across campus. While we have been welcomed, trans* oppression continues unabated on our campus, as it does on other campuses across the country (Nicolazzo, 2017b).

For example, I (Z) was asked recently to be in a “Diversity Is” movie that will be shown to students during orientation and will also be used for general marketing purposes for my host institution. Due to my outspoken and highly visible trans* femme identity, I was asked to be in the video. In this sense, my body is being used as a marker of my host institution having achieved the vision of “diversity.” My body will also be used to encourage students to come to the institution; the institution is quite literally looking to cash in on my non-normative body. Although I did make the ultimate decision to be in the “Diversity Is” video—because, as a former mentor once told me, “There is always at least one person who needs you to be you”—I remain uncomfortable with the dissonance between my own agency and the use of my non-normative body as a sign that my institution has accomplished, achieved, or arrived at some utopic state of diversity becoming.

Resistance

Certainly “teaching trans*” has met resistance from our students. Interestingly, we encounter different types of resistance. For instance, I (Katy) find that students often view my arts-based assignments as “not scholarly” and, as such, often refuse to take them seriously. While many students appreciate opportunities to explore different types of assignments, a few students in each of my classes have indicated that because the assignments are not “difficult,” they are not worthy of graduate school effort. I often find that while students are resistant at first, they typically recognize that to do arts-based work well, they have to reflect and spend much time on their assignments. However, I still have students who feel that my assignments are not “graduate school” assignments. What is still unclear to me is if students really feel that my arts-based assignments are not “difficult” enough, or if they do not take seriously the assignments because they are social justice based, as I have discussed in another article (Jaekel, in press). Whatever the reason, each semester I have students who seem to scoff at the assignments that ask for reflection, theorizing from the flesh, and arts-based works.

Conversely to Katy's experiences, I (Z) have been told by students that my coursework is “too much,” especially as it relates to focusing on persistent inequities and structural oppression in higher education. In one class I taught, Foundations of Higher Education, I received comments on my end

of term evaluations suggesting that I centered racism, colonization, and other forms of systematic oppression to the detriment of student learning. This student resistance was a response to my using Wilder's (2013) *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities*, as well as an edited volume about the organization and administration of higher education that centered the experiences of people of color. For example, when providing suggestions for improvement of the course, one student responded by writing, "[The] course is highly focused on marginalized populations. It is all we ever talk about. While that is an important topic, there needs to be a much broader range of topics discussed." Another stated, "Looking at more than just marginalized populations. Although that is extremely important there are other aspects of education that it would be nice to learn." A third wrote, "It felt like more of an [sic] diversity and equity class with some foundational material thrown in."

I have also been repeatedly misgendered throughout course evaluations by multiple students. While I hope this was not malicious, I have had previous experiences where students have used student evaluations to enact gender violence (e.g., by using my legal name, thereby suggesting I am not who I say I am and, as a result, my trans* identity is a fiction). Because student evaluations are masked, and because they are transactional rather than used to facilitate a dialogue between student and faculty, I will never know the intent behind my being misgendered. However, I do know that this resistance—both to my pedagogy and potentially to me—has stayed with me. Even writing this makes me tremble with worry. My gender is trouble, and that trouble shows up in my course evaluations as a form of excess, of being “too much” or extra, of not being what Jaekel (2016) referred to as being “normal, true, [or] right.”

Likely not surprising is some resistance we get for being trans*. This resistance looks many different ways. For me (Katy), because I am read as students and colleagues as some sort of funny cheerleader, my trans* identity is simply ignored. Both students and colleagues, when discussing trans* topics, center Z, my colleague, and do not mention me. For instance, because a building both of us had a meeting in (together) did not have an accessible gender-inclusive restroom, the meeting was moved to a building that could accommodate us. While we were pleased about this, the chair of the meeting indicated that the meeting was moved, “for Z” to be more comfortable. No mention was made of me, my comfort, or my needs. In that space, and in so many more, because I am coded as simply a woman in men's clothes, my body is ignored.

Thus, we are both coded as too much and not enough. We are hyper-visible and ignored. We are trouble and cheerleader, seen and unseen, too “difficult” and too “easy” in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this article was to provide readers with both a conceptual model and examples of teaching trans*. Throughout, we conceptualize teaching trans* as a type of disruption, one that centers trans* libratory practices that interrogate and expand notions of gender. In discussing both the affordances and constraints placed upon trans* bodies, we provide examples of ways in which classrooms can be sites for new knowledge production around gender. Importantly, in modeling teaching trans* to our students, they will be better prepared to engage in inclusive practices. As campuses become increasingly diverse, it is critical that practitioners engage in inclusive praxis to support student learning and development. This model can help achieve these necessary outcomes.

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