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Disclosure of trans & gender variant identities by students to students

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Disclosure of trans & gender variant identities by students to students

Abstract

In this study the ways in which trans and gender variant students come out to their cisgender peers is discussed utilizing a framework of communication privacy management (CPM), which is broken down into privacy ownership, privacy control, and privacy turbulence. Foundationally, this work was intended to magnify the experiences of trans and gender variant students in addition to expanding the application of CPM to the experiences of those who transition across binaries and who eschew them altogether. Previous literature examines CPM in a binarily gendered way, and does not take into account how the appearance of bodies can disclose private information outside of nonverbal communication. Similarly, much of the coming out literature available conflates gender identity with sexual and romantic orientations, this research has a specific focus on gender identity.

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This Paper

DISCLOSURE OF TRANS & GENDER VARIANT IDENTITIES
BY STUDENTS TO STUDENTS

by

C. A. Brimmer

is submitted in fulfillment of the Research Paper requirement of
the Department of Communication Studies
University of Northern Iowa
Cedar Falls, Iowa

November, 2020

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ABSTRACT

In this study the ways in which trans and gender variant students come out to their cisgender peers is discussed utilizing a framework of communication privacy management (CPM), which is broken down into privacy ownership, privacy control, and privacy turbulence. Foundationally, this work was intended to magnify the experiences of trans and gender variant students in addition to expanding the application of CPM to the experiences of those who transition across binaries and who eschew them altogether. Previous literature examines CPM in a binarily gendered way, and does not take into account how the appearance of bodies can disclose private information outside of nonverbal communication. Similarly, much of the coming out literature available conflates gender identity with sexual and romantic orientations, this research has a specific focus on gender identity.

DISCLOSURE OF TRANS & GENDER VARIANT IDENTITIES
BY STUDENTS TO STUDENTS

A Research Paper
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

C. A. Brimmer
University of Northern Iowa
January, 2021

This Study by: C. A. Brimmer

Entitled: Disclosure of Trans and Gender Variant Identities by Students to Students

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirement for the

Degree of Master of Arts in Communication Studies

Date _____ Dr. C. Kyle Rudick, Chair, Thesis Committee

Date _____ Dr. Danielle Dick McGeough, Thesis Committee Member

Date _____ Dr. Jennifer Waldron, Dean, Graduate College

DEDICATIONS

For the silenced transgender voices,

You matter, we will remember you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the hard work and efforts put in by my advisor Dr. Kyle Rudick. I would also like to thank my moms, Mary, Ron'na, Charla, and Theresa, my dad, Richard, and my friends who saw me through, Kelli, Jess, and Nathan.

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CHAPTER 1

Due to the shifting cultural values regarding gender identity, U.S. trans and gender variant¹ college-students are more likely now than ever to come out to instructors, fellow students and administrators. However, this act of disclosure can be risky, inviting discrimination, misgendering, and violence. Stolzenberg and Hughes (2017) argue that “transgender students lack important protections that would ensure their full participation in our nation’s educational system--an omission that has real consequences for their ability to succeed academically as well as for their overall well-being” (p. 42). According to the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey Executive Summary conducted by the National Center for Transgender Equality, “Nearly one-quarter (24%) of people who were out or perceived as transgender in college or vocational school were verbally, physically, or sexually harassed” (James et al., 2015, p. 9). Additionally, Stolzenberg and Hughes (2017) state that “52.1 percent of incoming transgender college students reported their emotional health as either below average or in the lowest 10 percent relative to their peers” (p. 40). Overall, trans and gender variant students comprise a population of students at risk and with particular needs in regards to educational settings.

With a wide range of physical and psychological risks to coming out, the idea of benefits to doing so may seem impossible. However, at the same time that disclosure practices put students at risk, research has found that it opens doors for instructors to

¹ Trans and gender variant are being used as an encompassing term for identities which mean the individual does not identify their gender with that which they were assigned at birth. Gender variant is added here to be inclusive of those who identify as identities such as non-binary, genderqueer, etc. but who do not identify themselves as trans. Additionally, cisgender refers to when someone’s gender identity matches their gender as designated at birth.

support students through confirmation behaviors, to feel more comfortable in classrooms and academic spaces, and to have a general ally within their academic community. For example, Stolzenberg and Hughes (2017) state, “Transgender students are likely to seek out the social support they need through opportunities on and off campus” (p. 43).

Additionally, Derlega, Metts, Petronio, and Margulis (1993) state the “socially mediated benefits of disclosing to a confidant include obtaining self-esteem support, informational support, instrumental support, and motivational support” (p. 101). Ultimately, evidence shows that the benefits of self-disclosure of trans and gender variant identities frequently outweigh the risks of doing so in academic settings.

Spencer and Capuzza (2016) call for communication research which includes transgender and gender variant identities as a means to “both deepen and broaden existing research and advance new lines of research related to student and instructor perceptions and communication in the classroom” (p. 115). Additionally, the authors add that trans inclusive research would also “help account for how transgender people are silenced in these [academic] contexts” (Spencer & Capuzza, 2016, p. 115). Similarly, Carroll, Redlick, and Hanchey (2016) argue that “instructional communication researchers are particularly well equipped to address” (p. 227) issues of gender variance and transgender identities in academic settings. As some researchers take up discussions of LGB teachers’ disclosures (e.g., McKenna-Buchanan, Munz, Rudnick, 2015), this study focuses on the acts of coming out of trans and gender variant students to cisgender peers.

It is vital to encourage academic discourse about transgender and gender variant students, and their experiences in institutions of higher education. Ullah and Wilson (2007) state that “activities such as... student-student interaction ... participation in extra-curricular activities... and quality of relations with peers have been positively associated with student persistence and educational attainment” (p. 1193). Recognizing the role of self-disclosure experiences in developing relationships with peers, I examine the ways in which trans and gender variant students utilize Communication Privacy Management in self-disclosure and relationship building practices.

First, I provide a background on Communication Privacy Management Theory (Petronio, 2002, 2013), which serves as the theoretical basis for this study. I also examine the coming out literature in relation to schools to provide context for this research as a whole. In chapter three I discuss my methodology. For this research I utilized snowball sampling, gathered informed consent, and then asked each participant to write a narrative about a significant coming out experience they had in college. After reading those narratives I interviewed each participant to gather further details about their experiences and find out more about what made that particular coming out significant to them. After combining the narrative with interview data, I returned a revised narrative to each participant so they could approve the final data, which I examined utilizing narrative analysis. In chapter four, I provide the narratives I used as data and the findings for each of the three participants, Chase, Ferris, and Anastasia. Finally, in chapter five I examine the theoretical implications of the application of CPM to each participant’s narrative, and look at both limitations of this study and future directions for this line of inquiry.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I look at how three aspects of Communication Privacy Management Theory (CPM) establish the analytical framework I use to examine student coming out narratives. I then look at the effects of student-student relationships in academic and social settings on academic achievement and social belonging.

Communication Privacy Management

Petronio (2002) states that the CPM is a “theoretical approach that gives us a rule-based system to examine the way people make decisions about balancing disclosure and privacy” (p. 2). This system helps scholars examine how everyday communicators choose who to disclose private information to, as well as when, how, and why individuals choose to self-disclose such information. Petronio argues that there is a difference between self-disclosure as a process and private disclosures that focuses on the content being shared. “Making *private information* the content of disclosure allows us to explore the way privacy and intimacy are separate but related fundamentally to the act of disclosure” (p. 5). CPM works from the idea that private information is “*owned* or *co-owned* with others” (p. 3) and that disclosure of private information can lead to a feeling of vulnerability which is managed through the idea of control.

Petronio (2013) asserts that CPM is comprised of three primary concepts: (1) privacy ownership, (2) privacy control, and (3) privacy turbulence. *Privacy ownership* is the idea that we own the private information about ourselves and the act of sharing this information creates co-owners with each person to whom we disclose. This aspect of

CPM “defines the boundaries surrounding information, marking it private” (Petronio, 2013, p. 9). When it comes to disclosing private information, such as gender identity, Petronio discusses the concept of boundary permeability, which translates into how likely a person is to disclose specific information (Petronio, 2002). The more permeable the boundary the more likely the individual is to disclose.

Boundary permeability relates to the next concept of privacy control. The less permeable a boundary is the more control an original owner maintains. Similarly, the more permeable a boundary is the less control that original owner has over their information. *Privacy control* denotes “the engine that regulates conditions of granting and denying access to private information” (Petronio, 2013, p. 9). This aspect of CPM argues that “because individuals believe they own rights to their private information, they also justifiably feel that they should be the ones controlling their privacy” (p. 9) regardless of if they have shared ownership with others through disclosure. In other words, private information is to only be disclosed by the original owner or with express permission of the original owner.

The idea of privacy control covers the rules and guidelines that an original owner of information requests co-owners to follow when it comes to their information. The idea is that “ownership and control are important to each other. Because the information belongs to us, we want to determine who is privy to it and who is not. Through control, we may protect against unwanted exposure” (Petronio, 2002, p. 9). The idea of unwanted exposure brings us to the third aspect of CPM, privacy turbulence.

Privacy turbulence occurs when disruptions in privacy management systems occur; in other words when boundaries around private information are broken (Petronio, 2013). In privacy turbulence the original owner is opened up to unwanted exposure and its associated risks. As this study examines the self-disclosures of marginalized identities, the risks associated with others knowing the original owner's marginalized status may vary drastically. The likelihood of privacy turbulence increases under certain conditions. Petronio (2002) offers the example of a confidant who does not agree to boundaries around the disclosed information. The risk is in the presumption that "the listener is interested only to find out that the recipient is unwilling to participate in boundary regulation" (Petronio, 2002, p. 19). In the case of this study participants must choose who to come out to, asking them about their considerations of the other person's willingness to protect their privacy will examine both the idea of limiting privacy turbulence and their considerations regarding who they disclose to, or make co-owners of information regarding their trans or gender variant identities.

Each of these three parts of CPM work together to create the framework for understanding the tension "between and...the needs of being both private through concealing and public through revealing" (Petronio, 2002, p. 12). The act of disclosure by the original owner is an invitation to enter the boundaries of what they consider private information and the original owner should articulate those boundaries to the new co-owner of information or the confidant. Petronio (2002) states that "people within the boundaries must coordinate with others so that the rules are known and used according to

agreed upon ways” (p. 19). This coordination of boundaries and rules facilitates the limitation of privacy turbulence by the original owner and their confidantes.

In short, CPM argues, “When personal information is shared, it moves into a collective domain where the information is no longer under the sole control of the individual.... Thus, through the disclosure of personally private information, collective boundaries are established” (Petronio, 2002, p. 19). CPM is a process that regulates intimacy in relationships through the management of private information. While there is precedence for utilizing CPM as a lens for examining coming out or self-disclosure narratives (see Gray, 2013; McKenna-Buchanan, Munz, & Rudnick, 2015), in addition to other contexts such as HIV status (see Lannutti, 2013), most of the literature focuses on specific populations, particularly LGB rather than T, and instructors rather than students. Despite the focus on LGB and instructors, this research helps inform this study in terms of the relationship between the coming out process and CPM.

Coming Out

Traditionally the term *coming out* is used to describe acts of self-disclosure about one’s own gender identity, or sexual or romantic orientation. Morrow (2006) defines coming out “...as the acknowledgement of a gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgender (GLBT) identity—initially to one-self and then to others” (p. 129). They argue that because social environments are not static and often shift, they present “new contexts in which GLBT people have to make new decisions relative to disclosures” (p. 130). Thus, Morrow takes a processual view of disclosure processes. In other words, Morrow recognizes that identity disclosure is a process, rather than a one-time occurrence.

Much of the coming out research and literature available focuses on gay, lesbian, and bisexual members of the LGBTQ+ community while claiming inclusivity of trans and gender variant persons by using the term queer, or the acronym LGBT, without focusing on trans and gender variant identities specifically (e.g., Fassett & Warren, 2010; Bronski et. al., 2006). Similarly, Spencer and Capuzza (2016) state that when the topic of LGBTQ+ identities are addressed in the field of Communication “transgender identity and expression are conflated with sexuality” (p. 114). Some authors draw a distinction between the LGB and trans and gender variant coming out narratives. For example, Zimman (2009) states that the constant state of coming out, or the processual narrative of coming out, frequently articulated by LGB individuals is not the same as how trans and gender variant individuals narrate their coming out experiences. Zimman argues that there are two types of coming out, one being a declaration or claiming of transgender identity and the other being a disclosure or sharing “of one’s transgender history after transition” (p. 60).

The process of self-disclosure about trans and gender variant identities requires that “GLBT people confront the socially constructed and personally internalized anti-gay shame and negativity – as well as gender role rigidity – that is perpetuated by society and lived out in families and communities” (Morrow, 2006, p. 131). Simultaneously, there is a stigma toward LGBT people who choose not to come out. Rasmussen (2004) states that “students and teachers who fail in their duty to come out may be marked as lacking, while those who do come out may be celebrated as role models promoting tolerance and inclusivity, empowering themselves and others” (p. 145). In addition, LGBT people,

particularly trans and gender variant individuals who choose not to disclose their gender or sexual/romantic identities, are often seen as disempowered or as dishonest (Rasmussen, 2004). During the year 2017, at least 28 trans people died in the United States as a result of violence, demonstrating the unique threat they face in society (“Violence Against the Transgender Community in 2017,” 2017).

Rasmussen (2004) ultimately argues that “coming out isn’t in and of itself inherently good or bad” (p. 148), and that the coming out process “is constructed differently depending on the individual (i.e., their race, age, family background) and the time, place, and space in which that individual is located” (p. 149). I conceptualize trans and gender variant students coming out to other students as process of constant (re)negotiation of their identities. Examining coming out as a process is important to understanding why trans and gender variant students may find it necessary to come out specifically to their peers in academic settings. Student-to-student relationships may be navigated differently than relationships with non-students and understanding how trans and gender variant students come out to student peers will help instructional communication scholars incorporate trans and gender variant students into the conversation.

Student-to-Student Relationships

Student-to-student relationships refers to those relationships built between students, at the same institution and/or within the same class. The study of student-to-student relationships has roots in Fassinger (1995; 1997) who called on instructors to develop class structures which enabled student-to-student connections and relationships;

and Dwyer et al., (2004) who examined classroom connectedness as directly connected to student relationships. Dwyer et al. articulated a “connected classroom climate as student-to-student perceptions of a supportive and cooperative communication environment in the classroom” (p. 267) and argued that “the component of student-to-student behaviors reflects students’ knowledge of one another and an interest in getting to know each other” (p.266). This reflects what Ullah and Wilson (2007) state about how developing a supportive student community is directly connected to student success in the forms of student persistence and academic attainment.

Sollitto, Johnson, and Myers (2013) state that “peer relationships are a vital component of the student experience and can effect such outcomes as classroom connectedness and assimilation” (p. 328). Similarly, Fassinger (1995; 1997), Dwyer et al., (2004), and Ullah and Wilson (2007) examine how building relationships between student peers develops a learning community focused on student success. Dwyer, et al., (2004), argue that fostering a positive climate through encouraging student connectedness “has been linked with retention and academic success” (p. 265). The ways in which students build positive climates through developing relationships with peers are linked with their success as students.

Student-to-student relationships help facilitate classroom connectedness. According to Sidelinger et al. (2011) “student-to-student connectedness focuses on the interactions that take place among students in the classroom. In the ideal connected classroom strong bonds exist, allowing students to express themselves openly and freely” (p. 342). Previously, authors Sidelinger and Booth-Butterfield (2010) found:

That even in larger classrooms, connectedness fostered a positive communication climate and sense of community for college students” and that “students’ perceptions of their peers had a greater impact on their classroom participation than did their perceptions of the instructor. (p. 177)

A sense of connectedness, then, is developed through building relationships between students and their peers and represents the community built within the classroom and university in general.

Specifically, classrooms that foster positive relationships between students develop the students’ experiences in school both academically and socially. Sollitto et al. (2013) state that “peer relationships are a vital component of student experience and can affect outcomes such as classroom connectedness and assimilation” (p. 328). Building student relationships, according to Fassinger (1995; 1997), involves instructors developing the opportunity for peer engagement within their classes and curriculum. Sidelinger et al., (2011) also argue that “a supportive peer climate [is] strongly associated with students’ in-class involvement (e.g., willingness to talk in class) and out-of-class involvement (e.g., self-regulated learning)” (p. 346). The act of self-disclosure is often seen as part of building healthy interpersonal relationships (Derlega et al., 1993) but should be examined in context.

Understanding self-disclosure as part of building relationships the contexts of the disclosure in terms of location and information is important. In their discussion of at-risk classifications of students, Lippert et al. (2005) argue that “the circumstances and

contexts that create at-riskness² are constantly changing” (p. 4), offering a perspective of contextualization to self-disclosures matters especially. Frisby and Sidelinger (2013) argue that self-disclosures by students in the classroom conversation “may increase perceptions of homophily, may facilitate participation, may provide relevant examples and may build a positive environment. The self-disclosure behaviors of students, then, have the potential to enhance (or disrupt) the overall learning environment” (p. 243). Rossi and Stringfield (1995) state that when a sense of community or connectedness is built in schools and classrooms “students felt cared about and respected...[and] maintained free and open communication, and all parties shared a deep sense of trust” (p. 74). Focusing on interpersonal self-disclosures, it is reasonable to assume that similar benefits or risks to the classroom may arise. Including trans and gender variant persons in this research opens the field to a pool of unrepresented persons whose lives drastically affect instructional communication.

Rationale

This study examines the ways in which two aspects of CPM—*privacy ownership*, and *privacy control*—affect the relationship between trans and gender variant students and their student peers. In the case of this research, *privacy ownership* around the disclosure of a marginalized identity means that a person may choose to share related information after weighing risks and benefits of others knowing about their gender identity.

² I am not necessarily classifying all trans and gender variant students as “at-risk” a category which needs to be addressed in its own rights. Here, I am utilizing the idea that contextualization matters when discussing these identities and disclosures in relation to student success.

Reynolds and Goldstein (2014) discuss privacy as an aspect of social transitioning. They argue that many trans and gender variant people reach a point in which privacy around their gender identities becomes more important than openly identifying themselves as trans or gender variant. Considerations of future privacy boundaries in terms of both privacy ownership and privacy control become necessary in the initial process of sharing, or creating authorized co-owners, of the private information regarding an original owners' gender identity. Here, I focus on the ways in which privacy control and privacy ownership are reflected in the narratives of trans and gender variant students. In this study, I am looking into the ways through which individuals decide to self-disclose private information, gender identity, to other parties considering risks and benefits of doing so. To reiterate, the risks associated with coming out include: *privacy turbulence* as its own risk, physical and psychological vulnerability to affirmative behaviors (benefits) as well as intolerant and abusive behaviors such as bullying, harassment, abuse and other forms of violence (Stolzenberg and Hughes, 2017; James et al., 2015).

As CPM examines the building of relationships through boundary and privacy management, it also examines this sense of connectedness with other students. Vanderburgh (2014) categorizes cisgender students with whom trans and gender variant students have not built a strong relationship, or those whom have been introduced as casual acquaintances, as people trans and gender variant students might find it difficult to come out to. Vanderburgh states that in terms of sharing gender identity it can “feel awkward to the casual acquaintance to have this level of intimate knowledge about

someone they are not close to” (p. 121). The awkwardness in this case is a two-way street in that coming out to casual acquaintances invites risks and benefits to varying degrees. CPM provides a language for understanding how students’ decide whether and how they navigate issues of safety when coming out to other students.

Reynolds and Goldstein (2014) examine aspects of social transitions for trans and gender variant individuals including coming out. They discuss the mistakes others make in terms of misgendering or misnaming trans and gender variant people, as part the coming out process. These mistakes can also be seen as part of negotiating acquaintances into more familiar relationships such as friends. Reynolds and Goldstein (2014) state “most people do not know what to do when they are corrected on someone’s pronouns. It is not something that is commonly talked about” (p. 127). Yet, cisgender people, even allies (i.e., people who advocate with members of an oppressed group, but do not share the group’s identity) offer advice to trans and gender variant people to communicate any emotions about being misgendered in a “calm and reasonable way, even if you are very upset” (p.127). This reflects Nicolazzo’s (2017) finding that trans and gender variant students are expected to educate others about their gender identities and needs as trans and gender variant people. Recognizing that student-to-student relationships may have more specific examples and circumstances in terms of relationship building and privacy management the general aspects of coming out as trans or gender variant remain the same.

Examining the interpersonal self-disclosures between students developing relationships both in, and out, of class is not as prominent in the literature examined.

Recognizing the absence of trans and gender variant students in this literature develops a window for examining how trans and gender variant students specifically, utilize self-disclosure to develop student-to-student relationships and thus facilitate, or disrupt, class climate and a sense of connectedness. If trans and gender variant students self-disclose to facilitate student connectedness, are they are doing so specifically for that purpose?

Otherwise, what are their reasons for self-disclosure?

Until now, studies of student-to-student relationships have primarily examined the ways in which cisgender student-to-student relationships affect classroom connectedness and climate (e.g., Dwyer et al., 2004; Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010; and Sidelinger et al., 2011). However, relationships built between trans and gender variant students and their cisgender peers have not been examined. While trans and gender variant students inevitably engage with their peers in similar ways to their cisgender counterparts, recognizing the particular circumstances faced by trans and gender variant students in creating a sense of student-to-student connectedness is important to understanding how to facilitate these relationships.

RQ: How do the narratives of coming out by trans and gender variant students show boundaries regarding their gender identity?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Participants

After obtaining IRB approval, I solicited students who met the requirements of being older than eighteen years old, currently attending college/university, and who identify themselves as trans, gender variant, or otherwise not cisgender. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling. I contacted several individuals whom I know that would have been likely to participate and/or whom might have known other possible participants who meet the requirements listed above. The initial contact was given a script which they could pass on, through private communication only, to other potential participants. All solicited individuals retained the right to deny participation in the study without repercussions. Participant recruitment did not go as well as I had hoped it would. I ended up with three participants in total.

Procedures

After receipt of their informed consent, participants were emailed prompts from which they were asked to write a narrative about a time they came out, or self-disclosed, their trans or gender variant identity to a student peer which they identified as significant in some way. I read through each narrative and developed questions meant to seek clarifying details about the coming out experience they shared. These clarifying questions along with other more specific demographic questions (e.g., questions asking about name, pronouns, age, school, etc.) were utilized during a semi-structured interview which took place either in person, by phone, or via video chat. Each interview lasted

approximately 30 minutes. If permitted by the participant, interviews were visual or audio recorded for transcription purposes to maintain the highest accuracy possible. I utilized the interview data to add details, as offered by participants, to the narratives provided. Then, I returned a copy of the narrative to the participants in order to facilitate member checking where they could accept, edit, or reject the returned narrative which, post-approval was used as the data to be analyzed.

Data Analysis

Data was examined through the lens of narrative analysis while utilizing communication privacy management as a theoretical framework. Narrative analyses are *storied accounts* which detail characters, settings, and problems rather than “following traditional qualitative procedures of breaking up narrative data to construct typologies” (Rudick, 2017, p. 5).

Positionality

As a trans scholar and researcher this work was undertaken specifically to address a gap in literature about trans and gender variant students. As trans and gender variant identities become more prominently accepted in culture at large, trans and gender variant students are increasingly able to come out to their peers in academic settings including dorms, student organizations, and, of course, classrooms. Throughout my time in higher education I have had to and/or chosen to engage in acts of self-disclosure with my peers and I understand the risks which participants take in doing the same but also in participating in this study. The gap in the literature is one that we as scholars, but also

trans and gender variant scholars in particular, must fill as a matter of representation but also for the improvement of educational experiences.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Chase: Coming Out as Self-disclosure

In college, I came out as trans/gender non-conforming to a friend/classmate I had been studying with for about 2 years at that point. We had taken one class about Queer studies prior to our capstone for our major. The major was small at this point, so all of the students in the major, at some point or another, get to know each other. We often spoke before classes and in between classes because most of the classes offered for the major were taught in the same building. My friend, Julie, and I were working on our capstone for our major, Ethnic & Gender Studies, and we grew close during that time because she was the person that I felt least threatened by in the class. I had been checking in with her the whole time I was doing research for my capstone, which was on transcending gender. I remember that each time I saw her during that semester I discussed a new piece of information that I had gained.

I also became close to her because at the time I was working on getting housing accommodations for LGBT students, who would feel more safe living in a community with other people who are LGBT or an ally. Julie was working on a project on building nonspecific inclusive healing communities, so we connected on that front as well.

I came out to Julie while I was working on my capstone. I had recently read a lot of material that discussed about gender and sexuality in depth; I finally starting to understand that gender was separate from sexuality, and that maybe that my gender was different than what people had told me my gender was my whole life. The more I read the

more I realized I did not fit into the gender I was assigned to at birth and that I was trans. I wanted to come out to my friend because she had been watching me go through the whole process and every time I told her I was questioning my identity she was super supportive of me and she never passed judgement. She made it clear that no matter who I was she was still going to be my friend.

When I finally told my friend that I was trans, I said it to her in person. I waited until we were in a place where I felt safe, the hall all of the classes for our major were held in. I felt as though even if she did not take what I was saying to her well, I would at least feel safe in my surroundings. I told her that I had been reading a lot of material about gender for my capstone and that I knew from what I had been reading that I do not identify with the gender that I was assigned at birth. One of the books I was reading gave a series of tests you could take to see where the person taking the test identifies on the gender spectrum and shortly after starting the test. I realized I was gender non-conforming. I then read a book that contained various stories of trans identifying people. After reading a few of those stories, I felt like I had found treasure. I knew that I could identify with what they had shared. I told her I had never really thought about gender until I started working on my capstone, but that after I got a more comprehensive understanding of gender, I knew I was not cisgender. I told her about when I was younger and how I always hung out with the guys, I never wanted to wear the pink, floral, or ruffled clothes that my mom bought me when I was a kid. I wanted to wear jeans and play with remote control monster trucks. I felt like I fit in when I hung out with the guys in ways I never felt like I fit in with the girls. As I got older, I never wanted to be called a

lady and at the end of college I told people I was comfortable with that I no longer wanted to use female pronouns.

Chase [they/them pronouns] is a 24-year-old, African American, in their second year of law school at a private institution. At the time of their narrative, Chase was a 22-year-old senior and attending a public 4-year institution. They noted a lack of support for trans students on campus stating, “I would say support was like individual people but there wasn't besides like the QSA and individual people not much support.” With limited support coming out can be even more difficult than it already is.

Chase’s story is one of explicitly coming out and disclosing their transgender identity. Rhoads (1995) states that “coming out is a process that all individuals who are gay must confront as an identity issue” (p. 9). Like many authors Rhoads focuses his work on gay men’s coming out experiences but I argue that the same holds true for other identities such as gender. Chase’s story shows how coming out is an important milestone, one fraught with uncertainty and anxiety. Rhoads also states that “For individuals who come to define themselves as queer, coming out is the first step in becoming engaged in the struggle against the politics of silencing” (p. 9). For Chase, coming out was a way to break the silence they were facing as they did research for their project. Manning (2015) found that “coming-out conversations are filled with touching, joyous moments of connection and sensitivity. Understanding the positive and negative elements of coming-out conversations could be beneficial to those who have someone come out to them or who are preparing for a coming-out disclosure of their own” (p. 68). Chase took the time

to decide who they would feel comfortable coming out to, and in doing so weighed the risks.

During our interview, Chase stated they came out to this particular person because they had been working on a project together and felt like it was a safe time and a safe person to come out to. “At first,” Chase said “I was nervous even though I knew that this could potentially be a safe person because you are never 100% sure how someone's going to react to you coming out to them. But as I felt them out throughout the interactions, so via text and then in person, I felt really great about the experience.”

Frymier and Weser (2001) as cited by Frisby and Sidelinger (2013) state that “it is important to note that students also contribute to the classroom environment through participation, discussion, and disclosure” (p. 242). Coming out is an inherently relational act, and doing so in an educational context highlights the power that student connections can have on disclosure acts. For Chase, this coming out brought relief and they felt “great about the experience.” Coming out to a classmate that they worked with demonstrates the student-to-student relationship described by Sidelinger and Booth-Butterfield (2010) who argue that connectedness is developed between students due to their in-class and university community interactions. Chase’s self-disclosure to Julie was facilitated, in part by the project both individuals were working on in which the instructor fostered positive relationships between students. Petronio (2002) states that “CPM assumes that others are also central to discerning the tension between being public and private” (p. 2). In Chase’s case, Julie was someone they could trust and therefore worth disclosing to.

Chase's decision to divulge private information, their gender identity, to Julie shows interpersonal trust developed between the two students and CPM (Dwyer et al, 2004). CPM suggests thinking about trust in terms of "trust credit points" (Petronio, 2002, p. 178). According to Petronio,

When a boundary is formed and people negotiate rules, they assume that the others can be trusted to follow these rules. In other words, they give each other a fair amount of trust credit points upfront, believing they will abide by the rules.

Trust points can increase or decrease from the moment on (Petronio, 2002, p. 179) For Chase, trusting Julie meant believing Julie would follow the rules Chase had for disclosing Chase's private information. Chase navigated their privacy boundaries, choosing to make Julie a co-owner of the private information that is Chase's gender identity (Petronio, 2002). Another important aspect of Chase's disclosure is how it connects with previously established understandings of privacy ownership. As CPM notes, relational closeness is a strong predictor of willingness to co-own private information (Petronio, 2002). According to CPM, co-ownership is what happens when you disclose your own private information to another person, they are expected to follow agreed upon rules for who they can and cannot tell that private information to (Petronio, 2002). Chase's narrative shows how relational closeness can play a large role in who a person discloses their trans identity to.

Ferris: Coming Out as a Requirement for Respect

In a room full of white, presumably cisgender women, the usual name-program-year introductions begin. I wait for someone else to say it first. For someone to

say “My name is _____ and my pronouns are ____.” I have, after all, had discussions with others in the room about how much easier it makes this life if they do. I am not anxious or scared, I am measuring the climate of the room, seeing if it has loud allies or silent ones. When it is my turn, I say it, the first person to do so. “Hello, my name is Ferris, I’m a second-year student, and I use he/him/his for my pronouns.” I make friendly but intense eye contact with the people in the room I haven’t met before. I hope this nonverbal signal communicates to them that I expect respect and believe that they are able to use the correct pronouns for me. There isn’t a reaction in the room, the person after me continues with their introduction, not including their pronouns. I prefer to come out to groups because there is more social pressure for people to not be assholes and it requires less labor to come out once rather than repeatedly.

Something to be noted, however, is the difference between silent and loud allyship. For me, silent allyship is often perpetuated by those with nothing to lose (those from privileged backgrounds) and loud allyship is most often seen, in our program, in the form of another marginalized person, in this case a queer woman of color, who has more to lose than white cis straight students by speaking out. This other student and myself have ongoing discussions about solidarity and what they need from each other in different spaces. We troubleshoot how to deal with the racism, homophobia and transprejudice that comes up in all aspects of our program, and use the “pod”³ concept from disability justice activists Mia Mingus and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarsinha to help identify the ways we can intentionally show up for each other in various spaces.

³ A term used instead of community in transformative justice work to refer to the people you are in relationship with (Mingus, 2016).

Ferris is a non-passing, 34-year-old, white, Jewish, graduate student studying psychology at a four-year public institution. His narrative is focused on a time when he disclosed to a group of fellow students rather than an individual as he prefers single group interactions to many one-on-one introductions. This particular narrative is representative of many of Ferris' coming out experiences and is thus significant for its ability to represent the gist of many of Ferris' disclosures. By sharing his pronouns with the room Ferris navigates privacy ownership as offered by Petronio (2002). He is making each peer a co-owner of his private identity and is not expecting what Petronio (2013) calls privacy turbulence, to be a problem as being outed would only serve him as a non-passing trans person by making it so he has to come out less often.

Additionally, the aspect of coming out to a group of people rather than in a one-on-one interpersonal situation needs to be addressed. Petronio (2002) states that

Groups are fundamental to our lives, yet in some groups we are more likely to consider whether to reveal or conceal private information. Social groups are the most obvious because they are geared to fulfill needs that require some disclosure to succeed (p. 166).

In Ferris' narrative we see his need to disclose to the group in order to be treated as the man he is. Another aspect to look at is what Petronio (2002) calls disclosure paradoxes that appear in Ferris' narrative. Whereas many disclosures are made to people trusted by the private information owner, "when a relationship is characterized by less commitment, disclosure appears to be more open" (Petronio, 2002, p. 139). As was said in his narrative

Ferris prefers to come out to groups “because there is more social pressure for people to not be assholes and it requires less labor to come out once rather than repeatedly.” Ferris is often not in a committed relationship to the groups he comes out to, and this may influence the way in which he comes out to said groups.

Communication privacy management argues that men and women develop rules for disclosure based on different criteria with men most often disclosing in dyads and women disclosing in groups. Ferris’ narrative challenges this assertion because trans people, in this case trans men, are not taken into account. When an individual is socialized as one gender but lives as another, in this case because they are another gender, understandings of theories such as CPM must shift to take into account the dissonance between gender socialization and gender identity. Petronio (2002) states that “just as a single person contributes to a group, transforming it into something new, so do individual disclosures grow into private information that belongs to everyone in the group” (p 167). Petronio goes on to discuss the ways in which groups might develop their own privacy boundaries for the group which Ferris does not discuss in his narrative.

Anastasia: Coming Out Through Naming

The first time I came out as a transgender woman was over Facebook. I had suddenly woken up July 28th, three in the morning, with an epiphany, and had immediately written a Facebook Note (back when those were a thing) detailing my new name and pronouns. This was a couple weeks before the start of my sophomore year of undergrad. All in all it went fairly well, and when my friends and I hung out in person a week or so later, it took some adjusting but we were fine. However, I had not yet

interacted with anyone new since I had come out. I went up to school a week early for band camp. For some reason I remember it being overcast that day, but I'm fairly certain it was actually rather clear that week. We (myself and the other students in the school band) were headed into the hockey rink for a rehearsal. An incoming freshman named Tayler and I ended up walking together and we started talking, bonding over both having lived in Wisconsin. We were just about to exit the dark concourse into the bright fluorescence of the stands when he asked me my name.

I reflexively responded with my birth name. I stopped. In the ensuing moment of silence, my hearing went fuzzy and the bottom dropped out of my stomach, as usually happens to me when something awkward is imminent. In that moment, I realized that I would have to reintroduce myself to everyone--not just a few close friends--starting with him. But then a feeling of relief washed over me as it occurred to me that I didn't have to tell someone that old name again, that I was allowed to call myself into existence out loud. "Actually," I said as he turned around, "my name is Anastasia. Sorry, I'm not used to saying it yet, I just changed it." Thankfully, he accepted this at face value and we moved on.

The lightness I felt in that moment, the possibility I glimpsed of a world where it really could be that easy, quickly dissipated as it came time for group introductions. We all went to the front of the band and introduced ourselves by sections. I figured this was my chance to normalize my new name by stating it as matter-of-factly as I could, as if it were always my name. But after my turn, thinking I was playing a practical joke, one of the leaders of the band who I had met the previous year said, "C'mon use your real

name". I learned in that moment that changing my name would be an uphill battle, and the careful hope I had developed speaking to Tayler sank into a bitterness that stuck to my voice as I responded, rolling my eyes: "Legally my name is [birth name] but like I go by Anastasia." The rushing in my ears and gut returned as the people who hadn't already been informed realized the implications of the change, while my friends who knew gave me sympathetic and supportive smiles. The band leader looked at me sheepishly as I sat down, understanding that she had just outed me as trans to a bunch of strangers. Luckily the moment passed without further incident, but I never forgot that feeling. Introducing myself to the band was a testing ground for whether or not people could just connect the dots and make the necessary changes on their own, or if I would have to explain myself at every turn, justify my existence in the face of endless questioning. What this taught me is that both are true, depending on the person. Some, like Tayler, just rolled with it without comment, while others, like several teachers, needed a more explicit spelling-out of what I was talking about. And then there were those like that band leader who required not just an explanation but a justification. All three were in that room staring back at me as I said my full name in public for the first time.

Anastasia [she/her pronouns] is a 27-year-old, white, transgender/genderqueer woman who currently attends a public college as a PhD student. At the time of her narrative Anastasia was 19 years old and was a sophomore attending a private undergraduate institution. She noted several places of support for her as a transgender

student, including her school's Center for Women's Studies where she interned and the counseling center who supported her in both their services and in writing a letter needed for her to transition. Anastasia also noted that the two queer student organizations on her campus, Lambda and Advocates, were supportive as well.

Anastasia further discussed having to disclose her birth name during the interview portion of her participation. She stated that she felt pressured into sharing her birth name and that internalized transphobia made her feel like she "owed people an explanation." Discussing being questioned about her birth name Anastasia stated her feelings:

I guess betrayal would be a right word... I mean I wasn't really emotionally invested in them as a person very much compared to other people in the group so it didn't SUPER matter but like yeah...in terms of like betraying my privacy yeah...because it was very clear like I was trying to start fresh because we had a bunch of new people in the group um...so even though there were a bunch of people who knew me and would need to sort of negotiate the difference between my new name my old name. and you know all the things that go along with it. There were still people who didn't know and who I didn't have to tell my birth name. That like that it could have been something where it just was.

Anastasia's narrative reflects some of the challenges trans individuals face in privacy boundary management when they are outed, however unintentionally.

Privacy boundaries shift during transition and birth names often become a well-guarded secret becoming what is known as dead names.⁴ In Anastasia's narrative, the

⁴ The name given to a trans person at birth which is no longer used if/when said trans person decides to change their name.

band leader believes her new name is a joke and uses social pressure to force Anastasia into saying the name she was given at birth. Privacy boundaries were established with this person through knowing Anastasia and thus Anastasia's narrative reflects privacy turbulence (Petronio, 2013). McKenna-Buchanan et al. (2015) state that "a risk of disclosing sexual orientation involves losing control of when and how that information is shared in the future" (288). I argue that the same is true for gender identity and, in some cases, a trans person may disclose their name one way and then, after transitioning, not have a say in how their deadname is used. This relates to privacy boundary turbulence (Petronio, 2002). Names, being part of our public personas are typically well known, after a transition it is difficult to disclose to everyone that your name has changed and to negotiate privacy boundaries about one's deadname.

Conclusion

Each participant came out verbally but using different words and strategies. Chase came out by saying "I am transgender," and asked Julie to use they/them pronouns. Ferris came out by saying his pronouns which differ from how many people code him as a non-passing trans person. He expected the people he was meeting to utilize his pronouns correctly without an explanation as to why they were necessary. Anastasia both came out voluntarily to Tayler through self-correction about her new name, and was also outed by the band leader who made her use her dead name. Petronio (2002) states that "The road to relationship development often depends on the way personal boundaries are transformed into dyadic boundaries through disclosure of private information" (p. 137). Each of the participants in this study expanded their personal boundaries in ways that

helped them to build relationships. Chase, Ferris, and Anastasia each had close, strong personal boundaries around their gender identities and related factors--as was the case with Anastasia's birth name. In each of their narratives they widened the area their boundaries encompassed, and made them more permeable so as to let others know that personal and private information.

Examining these narratives while considering the question of intent leads to three different conclusions as well. Chase decided to come out to a peer they already had a relationship with understanding the risk of being rejected or of facing what CPM calls privacy turbulence. For Chase, their coming out strengthened their relationship with their classmate, Julie. Ferris came out, not on behalf of other people, but for himself, to insist that he be gendered correctly. This type of disclosure engages the idea of intent and motivation for coming out. Lastly, Anastasia came out once for herself and in doing so fostered a sense of connectedness to Tayler, and again when she had to reiterate her identity to her peers when challenged about being herself and actively facing privacy turbulence. Anastasia's experience shows how disclosure is not always an action taken willingly.

Each narrative also shows a different set of circumstances in which trans and gender variant students may come out to their peers. Chase offers the example of choosing to come out when you first learn about the identity. Their boundaries are semi-permeable, open to some people, like Julie, and not others. Ferris chooses to come out at the start of group experiences like during class introductions or graduate student meetings. Ferris's boundaries are more permeable than most, as he comes out to large

groups of people on a regular basis in order to be properly gendered. Anastasia's coming out was not planned. Her interaction with Tayler was about in-the-moment circumstances, as was her being forced to come out by the band leader. At the time of her narrative, Anastasia's boundaries are also significantly permeable as she feels like she owes an explanation for her name change.

Determining who to come out to is seen differently in each narrative. Petronio (2002) discussing Wells and Kline 1986 study on gay and lesbians which says that "respondents reported that their greatest perceived risks of rejection are in disclosure to friends, family members, and coworkers" (p. 140). We see a similar trend in who each participant comes out to. Chase came out to someone they felt they knew well and who they felt would support them in their transgender identity. As a non-passing trans person Ferris comes out to everyone if he wants people to use the correct pronouns and treat him appropriately, but ultimately does not know the people he comes out to well. Anastasia came out to a new friend due to wanting to be referred to by the right name, and to a group of people whom she did not willingly choose to come out to after willingly coming out on Facebook.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

In this study, CPM was used to examine the disclosures of gender identity by trans and gender variant students. Specifically, I analyzed the narratives of coming out by trans and gender variant students as a way to show privacy boundaries regarding their gender identity. As the narratives demonstrate, privacy boundaries and rules inform the ways that participants described coming out to others. For Chase, coming out was a choice, made after reflection, and revealed to a close relational other. Ferris also chose when to come out to others, but used group spaces as their preferred venue to avoid making multiple individual disclosures. Finally, Anastasia came out to close relational others, but was also outed by another person, showing a disruption of privacy boundaries. Overall, these narratives provide a rich portrait of coming out narratives, both resisting normative understandings of the coming out myth and expanding CPM's framework.

CPM provides a rule-based system to examine decision making around balancing disclosure and privacy (Petronio, 2002). Boundary permeability refers to how likely, and in what contexts, a person is to disclosure private information (Petronio, 2002). Although there is an information on this phenomenon regarding how cisgender, gay, and lesbian teachers come out to their students, trans and gender variant students' experiences have not been examined in this framework. Trans and gender variant students often face the choice of disclosing their gender identity or being misgendered which may cause emotional distress (Cooper, Russell, Mandy, & Butler, 2020). The narratives in the present study provide insights into three areas to build CPM: (1)

disclosure of gender identity, (2) the role of group disclosure; and (3) the role of “outing” in privacy management. Below, I address these theoretical implications, using extant literature and participant narratives. I then offer pedagogical implications and articulate a set of inclusive practices for instructors who wish to support trans and gender variant students. I conclude by reviewing my limitations, future direction, and conclusions in the study.

Theoretical Implications

Privacy control refers to the rules and guidelines the original owner of information requests co-owners to follow when it comes to that particular information (Petronio, 2002).

Chase and Coming Out

Chase came out to a classmate after gauging whether or not that classmate was a safe person to disclose to. Their narrative shows a combination of privacy ownership and control. Chase’s narrative demonstrates the successful sharing of private information with another individual. Chase limited the permeability of their boundaries by disclosing just to one individual, but did not ask that person to keep the information private, or between them. Petronio (2002) states that “people within the boundaries must coordinate with others so that the rules are known and used according to agreed upon ways” (p. 19). Based on the conversation shared within their narrative, Chase did not coordinate boundaries with Julie. Thus, Chase both made Julie a co-owner of their gender identity as private information, but did not limit Julie in her ability to share that information with others. In doing so, Chase experienced a positive disclosure and demonstrated the ways

in which people sometimes do not negotiate rules about their private information (Petronio, 2002). Chase did not explicitly navigate what Petronio (2002) called the “boundary regulation process” which is a synchronized coordination of privacy boundaries by those involved in a privacy disclosure (p. 19).

The way in which Chase came out to Julie shows, in part, how coming out is what Morrow (2006) calls processual, by only coming out to one person Chase will likely need to come out again in the future, possibly numerous times, to have their identity seen by others. Macgillivray (2000) presented many risks of coming out for LGBTQ+ students, that Chase seemed to avoid in their disclosure process including social exclusion, curricular exclusion, health risks, as well as peer harassment and antigay abuse. At the same time, by not restricting Julie by making their privacy boundaries less permeable through rules about who Julie could or could not tell, Chase also left themselves wide open to these risks and harms in the future if Julie were to tell others who disagreed with Chase’s identity.

Chase’s disclosure mirrors many coming out narratives in that Chase began to recognize themselves as other than cisgender, and eventually wanted to disclose that to another person whom they trusted. Petronio (2002) emphasizes the importance of trust in disclosure and how relational closeness, like that between Chase and Julie, can be a predictor for making someone a co-owner of your private information. This was Chase’s first time coming out to someone, and it appears they trusted Julie not to disclose this information to others without their consent despite not specifically negotiating that boundary.

Ferris and Group Disclosure

Ferris disclosed his gender identity to a group of graduate school classmates in a single interaction. His disclosure was indirect, inferred through his non-passing appearance and the statement of his pronouns during introductions. Ferris's disclosure addresses some demonstrations of coming out which are not significantly represented in the social scripts of coming out nor in the literature. Each peer in the group that Ferris shared his pronouns with became co-owners of his private information (Petronio, 2002). Additionally, Ferris's boundary permeability was high in that he was very open with his identity and did not set rules with his peers regarding their sharing the information he provided. The lack of rules was intentional on Ferris's part in that unauthorized sharing of this information by co-owners means less emotional labor involved with coming out repeatedly on his part.

Ferris's narrative highlights an area of weakness in the CPM/disclosure literature available in that there is not a lot of literature on group disclosure. As previously discussed, CPM is used to argue that men typically disclose in dyads and women disclose in groups. Ferris provided evidence that this might not be the case for all men. The role of being socialized as a woman before coming out as trans may have played a role in why Ferris feels more comfortable making disclosures to groups rather than individuals. This is an area that future research could explore more in depth as it relates to gendered applications of CPM.

Additionally, the ways in which bodies can disclose identities, especially when combined with verbal disclosures, is not examined in depth in either coming out nor CPM literature. When an individual is coded as one gender and then explicitly discloses, or states, they are another gender, their bodies may out them. This is not a matter of nonverbal communication but one of assumptions made about bodies based on socially constructed cues like the absence or presence of breasts, facial hair, or Adam's apple. Additionally, height differences, where weight is carried, or the size and shape of features like shoulders or hips, tend to be assigned particular genders in the context of the United States. Thus, further research on group disclosure of private identities, and the ways in which bodies aid, or force, disclosures, would be useful as time goes on.

Anastasia and Being Outed

The case of Anastasia combines several aspects of CPM including privacy ownership, privacy control, and privacy turbulence. Anastasia's narrative above includes an internet disclosure, a one-on-one disclosure to Tayler, and a coerced group disclosure. The internet disclosure was the most explicit in that Anastasia disclosed both her new name and pronouns. The one-on-one and group disclosures were more implied through the use of Anastasia's former name, or dead name, and her new name.

Deadnames, which can be known widely after a transition has been made, challenge privacy control because originally, the deadname was not private information. Renegotiating privacy boundaries about deadnames does not always work, especially if someone does not accept the social transition of the individual. This may result in privacy turbulence. For example, Anastasia's narrative evidences the ways in which trans and

gender variant individuals face privacy turbulence when socially transitioning from one name to another. In Anastasia's case she was forced to deadname herself during band introductions due to privacy turbulence. *Privacy turbulence* occurs when disruptions in privacy management systems occur; in other words when boundaries around private information are broken (Petronio, 2013). Petronio (2002) offers the example of a confidant who does not agree to boundaries around the disclosed information. People informed of a deadname often are not asked to keep the name private before it becomes a deadname. Thus, Anastasia's narrative pushes CPM and disclosure literature to consider the public becoming private in future research.

Morrow (2006) argues that disclosure of gender identity is a process rather than a one-time occurrence. This study, particularly due to Anastasia's narrative, found this concept to be true. Each narrative provides one or two instances of coming out which are some of many each individual experienced. Similarly, Rasmussen (2004) argues that those who do not share their trans or gender variant identities are seen as dishonest. Anastasia's narrative shows us the ways in which disclosing her new name without first disclosing her deadname, was seen as being dishonest.

Similar to Ferris's disclosure narrative, Anastasia's narrative evidences a lack of writing about group disclosures. Anastasia's experience of being outed constitutes a different kind of disclosure experience which is addressed in some forms of coming out/outing literature but which are not well articulated in the CPM/disclosure literature. In other words, Anastasia's narrative pushes some of the literature in this area to expand.

Other Theoretical Implications

There are ways in which bodies can force disclosures about some private information that is not addressed in current CPM literature. In this instance, I refer less to nonverbal signals such as smiling or blushing, and more to physical characteristics typically associated with genders assigned at birth. For example, Ferris, as a non-passing transman would be coded by others as a woman without the verbal cues (such as name and pronouns) which he provides upon introducing himself. Current CPM literature focuses specifically on verbal messages and disclosures. As a non-passing transman Ferris's body outs him as soon as he says he uses he/him pronouns. Passing refers to "blending into the cisgender population" ("Guidelines for psychological practice," 2015, p. 835), and may or may not be a goal depending on the trans or gender variant individual. By incorporating the ways in which passing protects privacy boundaries CPM can more fully examine the experiences of trans and gender variant individuals.

Ultimately, the findings of this study encourage a deeper understanding of group disclosure literature, outing and passing/non-passing as they relate to privacy management, and deadnaming. The pedagogical implications of this study, offered below, provide means for instructors to encourage gender identity disclosures while respecting students' privacy in the classroom setting.

Pedagogical Implications

Based on the findings of this study, instructors can make certain changes in the classroom to enable a smoother and less threatening social transition/disclosure process for trans and gender variant students. Sollitto et al. (2013) argue that peer relationships are a key part of student experience and can influence student success in the forms of

student persistence and academic attainment. Sidelinger et al. (2011) argues that student-to-student connectedness allows for students to express themselves openly and freely in the classroom. This was evidenced in Chase's narrative as they had formed a bond with Julie through classroom activities such as regularly working together on personal work, and being encouraged to talk to their peers about their projects. By facilitating relationships between students through encouraging students to interact, and providing a comfortable space, instructors are fostering connectedness and therefore classroom achievement (Frisby & Martin, 2010). Additionally, Sidelinger et al. (2011) argue that a supportive classroom climate increases willingness to talk in class as well as out of class learning, such as how Chase and Julie regularly worked on their class projects together outside of class time. By facilitating self-disclosure instructors facilitate the building of healthy interpersonal relationships among students (Derlega et al., 1993). Thus, student-to-student connectedness as built by facilitated self-disclosure may increase students' success in the academic arena.

When Ferris introduced himself in his narrative, he shared his pronouns with the group. Disclosing one's pronouns, and requesting that each student does the same, can foster a supportive classroom experience for trans and gender variant students. The Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN) states on their website that "Including pronouns is a first step toward respecting people's gender identity, working against cisnormativity, and creating a more welcoming space for people of all genders" (Pronouns: A resource for educators). Zane (2016) recommends instructors leading by example by offering their pronouns in their syllabus, communicating them verbally on

the first day of class and asking students' names and pronouns in a discrete manner on day one. In other words, by facilitating the disclosure of pronouns in start-of-term introductions, a normalization of disclosure and of the practice of sharing pronouns in particular occurs. Utilizing more gender inclusive language such as "folks," or "everyone" instead of "guys" and avoiding gendered titles such as "Mr.," "Mrs.," and "Ms." are also part of Zane's guidelines to creating a more inclusive classroom.

Recognizing that not all students will want to share their pronouns or be able to without outing themselves (as in Ferris' case), offering to refer to all students who do not share their pronouns with gender neutral pronouns is an option. Overall, however, encouraging all students to share their pronouns provides room to develop a gender-inclusive supportive community. Anastasia's narrative brings to light a common complication for instructors of trans and gender variant students, what should be done if someone outs a trans students intentionally or not, or if you hear someone make name/pronoun mistakes? Zane (2016) states, "Please correct the in a polite manner, even if the person being referring [sic] to is not present. For example, 'I believe Sam uses 'they, them, their' pronouns'." Zane also recommends preserving student confidentiality and being aware of both FERPA and Title IX guidelines regarding student information.

By developing a supportive student community, student success, in the forms of student persistence and academic attainment, occur more (Ullah & Wilson, 2007). Instructors can ease the transition processes for trans and gender variant students by preventing or managing situations like that which was found in Anastasia's narrative. One way to prevent name discrepancies from coming to light, is not reading names off of

rosters. According to Emerson College's LGBTQIA+ student life page, is to "ask individuals present to identify themselves. Then settle any discrepancies with printed or electronic materials in private (Affirming gender identity). Instructors can interrupt the questioning of name as was seen in Anastasia's narrative. A small interruption, such as defending the trans or gender variant student's right to use their chosen name, can make the classroom a much safer/supportive space for trans and gender variant students.

In summary, the pedagogical implications are to foster gender inclusive environments for students, to lead by example regarding pronouns, and to foster student-to-student relationships through community building exercises. Additionally, being firm in your usage of students chosen names and pronouns regardless of a student's presence in a space at a given time sets the precedence for other students. While these solutions and pedagogical implications are drawn from literature that primarily focuses K-12 learning environments the same principles apply in college classrooms.

Limitations & Future Directions

This study faced several limitations from the start including participant recruitment methods. In order to not accidentally out anyone in the trans and gender variant student population, online recruitment was barred by the IRB. Utilizing snowball sampling did not expand the sample in the way which I had hoped, and three participants total limited the amount of data received by the primary investigator. Thus, one future direction is re-navigating the IRB and recruitment methods in order to develop a sample more representative of the population.

A second limitation of this study was the lack of prior research on trans and gender variant (student) disclosures. As time goes on other research may fill in areas which I found lacking as I conducted my literature review. Of course, this means that more research on trans and gender variant (student) disclosures is a future direction to be explored by researchers.

Another limitation was the ways in which the theory did not account for group disclosures or the ways in which bodies and gender expression disclose information about us. Further research on these topics is also warranted by this study.

Conclusion

Communication privacy management may not take into account the way bodies disclose information, and current literature may fail to recognize how trans and gender variant student identity disclosures are different from disclosures about sexuality, but the shift towards recognizing these things is possible. This study examined, however briefly, the ways in which trans and gender variant students disclose their gender identity to other students in both willing and unwilling circumstances.

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