

# Transgender/nonbinary students and institutional best practices: A critical conversation

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Moderator: Vanita Narayana (she/her)



# Land Acknowledgement

- Central Michigan University sits on the beautiful lands maintained for generations by the Anishinaabe people, the forbearers of the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, the indigenous inhabitants of Michigan with whom we continue to partner with.
- The University of Wisconsin–Madison occupies ancestral Ho-Chunk land, a place their nation has called Teejop (day-JOPE) since time immemorial. In an 1832 treaty, the Ho-Chunk were forced to cede this territory. Decades of ethnic cleansing followed when both the federal and state government repeatedly, but unsuccessfully, sought to forcibly remove the Ho-Chunk from Wisconsin. This history of colonization informs our shared future of collaboration and innovation. Today, UW–Madison respects the inherent sovereignty of the Ho-Chunk Nation, along with the eleven other First Nations of Wisconsin.

# In 60 minutes or less...

- Review the complexities regarding transgender and nonbinary student resiliency and how we, as educators, can help by:
  - Educating ourselves and raising awareness
  - Promoting resources and increasing access
  - Providing educational opportunities
  - Paying specific attention to cisnormative campus spaces

# IDEAL Space

- Safe Space > Brave Space > Ideal Space
- IDEAL Spaces
  - Inclusive
  - Diverse
  - Equitable
  - Accessible and Authentic
  - Learning

# Pronouns

- Pronouns are never preferred
- When in doubt:
  - Ask: What are your pronouns?
  - Use gender inclusive pronouns they/them/their
- Do not assume someone's pronouns just because of the way they are dressed
- Asking for someone's pronouns is encouraged, but respect their silence if they choose not to tell you
- When someone tells you their pronouns, respect and use them

# Real-Life Mistakes & Recovering

## Mistakes

- “Him or Her or Whatever”
- “Ladies and Gentlemen, we will start in a few minutes...”
- “Hey, guys, let’s go...”
- Refusing to use someone’s name or pronouns.

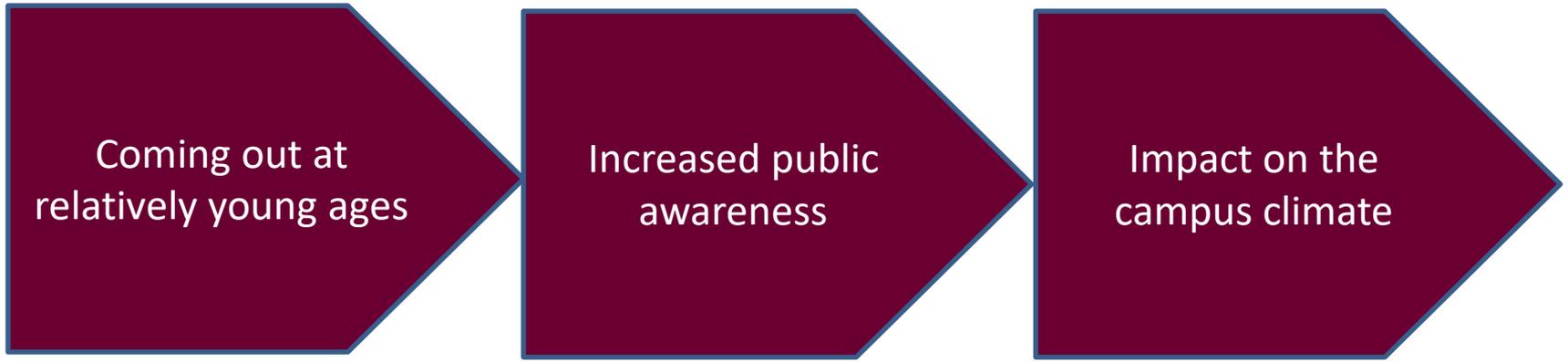
## Recovery

- Recognize and apologize
- Avoid making the mistake again
- Educate yourself

# What unanswered questions do you have about...

- Gender identity
- Gender expression
- Pronouns
- Gender inclusive vs. gender neutral
- Difference between gender identity and sexual orientation
- Difference between sex and gender
- Difference between transgender and nonbinary and gender fluidity
- Anything we have covered (or haven't covered) so far related to the transgender and nonbinary community?

# Introduction



(Dolinsky and McCambly, 2014)

Campus climate is defined as the behavior, perceptions, and attitudes of the community towards various dimensions of life (Peterson and Spencer, 1990)

# Background of the Problem

- Gender and socialization play a key role
- Mistreatment occurs in many aspects of their lives, including families, public services, school, and work
- 41 percent of respondents report attempting suicide
- Higher education decreases the likelihood to live in poverty, abuse drugs or alcohol, or resort to sex work as a means to survive.

(Grant et al., 2011)

# Research Method and Design

- Phenomenological research design (van Manen, 1997; Willis, 2001) allowed:
  - In-depth understanding of individual phenomena
  - Rich data from the experiences of individuals

# Data Collection

Student	Academic Standing	Gender Identity	Pronouns
Alex	Freshman	Nonbinary	They, them, their
Austin	Sophomore	Genderfluid	They, them, their
Ellery	Not disclosed	Nonbinary and trans*	They, them, their
Gwynn	Not disclosed	Transwoman	She, her, hers
Hank	Sophomore	Male	He, him, his
Jay	Sophomore	Transgender man	He, him, his
John	Sophomore	Male	He, him, his
Lucas	Sophomore	Transgender man	He, him, his
Raven	Junior	Genderqueer	They, them, their
Ray	Senior	Androgynous/Genderfucky	She, her, hers

# Findings

Five major themes emerged

- Student resiliency
- Language and visibility
- Availability of and access to resources
- Education and awareness
- Campus spaces

# Student Quote

*“What are you going to do? Not go out in public? Yeah, it’s bad. It sucks. I wish it wasn’t like that, but I can’t not go to my classes.” - Gwynn*

# Findings: Student Resiliency

- Persistence in an oppressive environment
- Through lack of gender recognition
- With extra levels of anxiety that their cisgender peers do not have to navigate

# Student Quote

*“People ask why I’m tired all the time. ...I’m tired all the time because I’m hypervigilant constantly, and then I’m either answering questions for cisgender people who don’t know or [transgender] people that are just finding themselves or [transgender] friends that are like, “Hey, can you help me just talk through this?” I just want to cry to somebody. You’re expected to be this ambassador, and I’m 19.” - Lucas*

# Findings: Student Resiliency

- Passing within the binary is both a blessing and a curse

# Student Quote

*I'm not going to say that it's easier for binary [transgender] people, because their struggles are very hard and specific to them. I do think that staff would tend to be a little bit more understanding, just because there's more knowledge available about what being binary [transgender] means for a person.... Nowadays, it's more accepted to be a binary [transgender] person than to be non-binary because there's more information. [Identifying as binary transgender] seems like that's accepted as fact, whereas nonbinary identities can sometimes be opinion. People think that they get to decide whether or not [the nonbinary identity] is valid - Alex*

# Findings: Language and Visibility

- Inclusive language is important to establish a welcoming campus climate
- Transgender and nonbinary students are looking for visible recognition from the administration that they are a part of the campus community

# Student Quote

*I think it's one of those things where if there were options on the forms to indicate that I was [transgender], it would have been cool. Also, it would not have been cool because then I probably would have been discriminated against for being [transgender] and then have no way to prove that - Ellery*

# Findings: Availability of and Access to Resources

- Despite existence of resources, students are:
  - Unaware that the resources exist; and/or
  - Resources are inadequate to meet their needs
- Students struggle to find safe bathrooms in all buildings on campus

# Student Quote

*“Sometimes I would even have to pick my classes based on that [bathroom availability]. Sometimes classes are in a building where there’s no gender neutral bathroom, but also it’s far away from any other building that does. That’s just not reasonable. If I had to go to the bathroom during class, for example, I would have to leave class for like 20 minutes just to do that.” - Gwynn*

# Findings: Education and Awareness

- Cisgender members of the university community lack basic education and awareness

# Student Quote

*“I got this sort of firsthand experience of like how uninvolved upper administration really is ... even like saying that they care about the programs we put on. They aren’t willing to take any steps to mitigate their own ignorance or prejudice, which I think is a huge issue.” - Ellery*

# Findings: Education and Awareness

- Specifically related to classrooms
  - Not safe for transgender and nonbinary students
  - Pressure to speak up and accept the responsibility of teaching others about their identity and community

# Student Quote

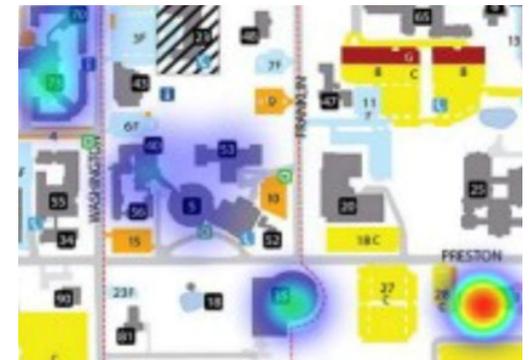
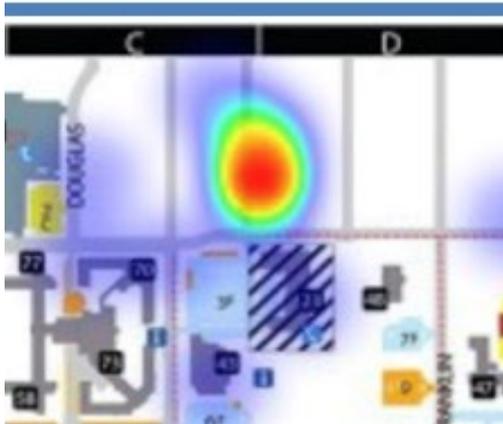
*“I know that that happened to me sometimes when I was a freshman, especially in my first semester. I wasn’t actually out in a lot of my classes because I wasn’t sure what was really safe. If anything like that had happened, sometimes I did sort of speak up in a meek little way, but oftentimes I would just sit there and let it happen around me and feel super uncomfortable because of it.” - Ellery*

# Findings

Pervasive, cisnormative environments seem to implicate areas where students feel unsafe

Physically/emotionally* safe	Physically/emotionally* unsafe
LGBTQ services* Library* Supportive faculty members coinciding with program of study	Counseling center* Fraternity and sorority housing Poorly lit areas of campus Residence halls (first year in particular) Student fitness center*  Student services building*

# Heat Maps



# Implications and Recommendations

## Improve

- Gender inclusive language through all levels of the community – verbal and print material
- Current resources
- Training across all levels
- Areas of emotional/physical safety for students

# Implications and Recommendations

Specifically...

- Bathrooms
  - Identify and promote safe, gender-inclusive bathrooms
- Education and awareness
  - Provide educational opportunities for the campus community
- Outreach to transgender and nonbinary students

# Implications and Recommendations

- (In)visibility of language and resources
  - Implementation plan to better meet the needs of transgender and nonbinary students
- Examine and address barriers for transgender and nonbinary students regarding name changes and pronoun recognition
  - Accommodate name changes, including but not limited to email, ID, class roster, transcripts, and diplomas

# Implications and Recommendations

- Enhance services offered through...
  - Civil rights
  - LGBTQ services
  - Health services
  - Counseling center
  - Residence life
  - Classrooms

# Improving Campus Climate

- Implementing policies that support transgender/non-binary students:
  - Chosen name policy - “preferred name policy”
  - Non-discrimination policy that includes sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex
  - Gender inclusive facilities (locker rooms, bathrooms, residence hall rooms)
- Access to inclusive health care, including counseling services and sexual assault survivor advocacy programs
  - Provide extensive training for those in campus health care/advocacy settings
- Provide co-curricular programming for incoming students that focuses on creating community for LGBTQ+ students, and educating about LGBTQ+ student inclusion

# Small ways to make an impact in the classroom

- Educate yourself about the community
- Attend programs
- Use gender-inclusive language
- Ensure students feel safe
- Respect and use names and pronouns

# Syllabus statement: Name and pronoun

All people have the right to be addressed and referred to in accordance with their personal identity. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by a different name and gender pronoun. Please reach out to me early in the semester, so that I may make changes to my records. I will do my best to address and refer to all students accordingly and support classmates in doing so as well.

# Syllabus statement:

## Safe classroom

I consider this classroom to be a place where you will be treated with respect, and I welcome individuals of all ages, backgrounds, beliefs, ethnicities, genders, gender identities, gender expressions, national origins, religious affiliations, sexual orientations, ability – and other visible and nonvisible differences. All members of this class are expected to contribute to a respectful, welcoming and inclusive environment for every other member of the class.

# Conclusion

Current transgender and nonbinary persistence seems to be solely due to the students' ability to remain resilient while navigating a hostile climate, to the LGBTQ services director, and their peer community.

If the university community is truly committed to the success of all students, there needs to be a serious commitment to the success of transgender and nonbinary students.

# Student Quote

*“Part of it is the fact that it is not the best climate for [transgender] students. I think. Like the fact that [transgender] students either don’t come to [the institution] or don’t stay there. You still have to care about their needs because you not caring is the reason why there’s a small population.” - Ellery*

# Discussion

# Thank you!

- Dr. Jon Humiston - [humis1jp@cmich.edu](mailto:humis1jp@cmich.edu)
- Mr. Aaric Guerriero - [aguerriero@wisc.edu](mailto:aguerriero@wisc.edu)
- Ms. Vanita Narayan  
[vani.narayana@ansrsource.com](mailto:vani.narayana@ansrsource.com)

## Question/Answer Follow-Up from “Transgender and Non-Binary Students and Campus Climate” presentation

Thank you for attending our presentation! We were not able to respond to all of the questions that came in, so we responded to the questions here. Please feel free to follow up with Jon ([humis1jp@cmich.edu](mailto:humis1jp@cmich.edu)) and Aaric ([aaric.guerriero@wisc.edu](mailto:aaric.guerriero@wisc.edu)) via email for additional questions or further clarification Thank you!

### Question 1:

John Grummel 03:27 PM

*At my university, we are finally looking to update our safe space/ally training materials (they are almost 10 years old)--any suggestions on some best practices/institutions that seem to be doing better, etc.,?*

Hi Josh! I think that's great that you are all looking to update and enhance your safe space/ally training materials. I would recommend accessing the LGBT Architect through the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Professionals. This is a compilation of resources by professionals who are leading such programs across the country. If your campus is not a member of the Consortium, I would also recommend joining. Additionally, I would be happy to provide you with materials that I have created through my time developing Safe Zone programs at universities and also through consulting opportunities. Feel free to send me an email at: [aaric.guerriero@wisc.edu](mailto:aaric.guerriero@wisc.edu) and I'll be happy to share materials and resources. - Aaric

### Question 2:

Kevin Rose 03:54 PM

*I teach primarily online. Any best practices you might be able to share about creating more inclusive and safe learning environments for online environments?*

Hi Kevin, and thank you for the question. Two colleagues and an undergraduate student and I wrote a chapter titled, “Intentionally Creating an Inclusive and Welcoming Climate in the Online Learning Classroom.” The chapter (Chapter 12) is focused on exactly your question. You may have to ask your Library for access, but you can find it here: [Intentionally Creating an Inclusive and Welcoming Climate in the Online Learning Classroom](#) or if you send me an email [humis1jp@cmich.edu](mailto:humis1jp@cmich.edu), I may be able to help. - Jon

### Question 3:

Jordan Trachtenberg (she/her) 03:24 PM

*Related to Craig's question, do you have any best practices for reporting retention and graduation data for transgender and nonbinary students, both internally and externally? This is especially challenging given that our federal reporting guidelines are not inclusive of various gender identities.*

Unless the university has a mechanism for allowing students to self-identify genders other than man/woman (sex is a Federally required mandate: male/female), then I do not know how an institution would track retention efforts. You could ask for this information at the time a student applies for graduation (if that is the practice of your institution) so you could track students after their graduation. - Jon

Hi! Aaric here. I would also add that some universities are able to do their own "exit surveys" in academic colleges. These aren't tied to the federal reporting guidelines so using a more inclusive and open gender and sexual orientation data collection method is possible. I would also take this moment to discourage the use of "other" in any survey capturing social identities. As someone who holds many marginalized identities, I feel "othered" in so many spaces and that just enhances that feeling when forced to choose that on a survey.

Question 4:

Rebekah Bell 03:25 PM

*I have heard of faculty in some institutions that feel (or have been led to feel through institutional messaging) that issues like this is taboo because of the recent political conversations/actions taken against diversity training. What advice would you give to people who are pulling back from this space because they fear reprisal right now*

Hi Rebekah, thank you for this great question. The fear around supporting and promoting diversity training is definitely real so thank you for bringing this up. My advice would be that we as leaders in our institutions look at the cost of NOT supporting diversity and inclusion work/training. Who is losing out when we do that? Sadly, issues around social justice have become so politicized that the core of inclusion gets lost. I believe there is a way to promote respect and civility that invites everyone to the proverbial table. Approaching inclusion from a place that feels, well, inclusive can often be a greater tool than trying to get colleagues and administration to get past the divisiveness. I'm happy to engage in a greater conversation about this too, and provide tools to use in these spaces. Please feel free to reach out to me at [aaric.guerriero@wisc.edu](mailto:aaric.guerriero@wisc.edu). - Aaric

Question 5:

Amanda R Morley 03:26 PM

*Any insight to support students who might be in transition in the pronouns they identify with and communicating this with other faculty/staff/students.*

I think the most important thing is to follow the lead of the student who is in transition to ensure they are comfortable with you communicating their pronouns and identify with others on their behalf. It's a very personal thing, and each individual may have different needs. One student may give you the go ahead. One student may ask that you keep it to yourself and allow them the opportunity to come out. Another student may give you the go ahead to share and then regret it later because they had not thought

through how quickly the information would spread. The most important thing you can do is to have a thorough discussion with the student and support them based on where they are at. - Jon

Question 6:

Paul Namaste 03:58 PM

*I apologize because I was a few minutes late so feel free to address this later to me at paul.namaste@ncssm.edu, but I saw that you preferred ideal space to brave space or safe space, but you have used the term safe space several times in the past few minutes. What is the distinction between the uses of safe space as you see them?*

You raised a great point, Paul. In terms of our presentation, Aaric and Jon started the training by noting the problems with creating safe zones or posting a safe zone sticker. We've done social justice work for 20+ years and could not control any unintentional comment from triggering someone else, and so we find it difficult even for us to say we're a safe space and potentially do something to harm and betray a student's trust that way. Research seems to be calling for the creation of Brave Spaces as opposed to creating Safe Spaces, and we see this is also problematic. At least with Safe Zones the onus is on each individual for creating the safe zone. In creating a Brave Space, the onus shifts back to the students or visitors to the space to share their discomfort and experiences. This places the burden back on the person in the oppressed position to educate others and potentially be further harmed based on the responses. Later in the presentation, we discuss the spaces where students felt emotionally and/or physically safe. We try to avoid saying Safe Zones or Safe Spaces because of the problems noted above. If the phrase was used several times, it's probably because shifting language is sometimes difficult to do and while we are trying to do our best to shift, safe spaces is a pretty common phrase you hear in higher education. I hope this helps answer the question, but feel free to reach out to me if you have additional questions at [humis1jp@cmich.edu](mailto:humis1jp@cmich.edu). - Jon

Question 7:

David Heard 03:15 PM

*What is an appropriate way to ask a student how to pronounce their name without disrespecting anyone?*

Hi David, this is a great question! For example, when I interview staff members (student or pro staff), at the beginning of the interview, I always ask the candidate to share the correct pronunciation of their name. I let them know that names are very important to me, so I want to be sure that I am honoring them and acknowledging them appropriately. This could also be done when taking roll in class by stating something like: "I have your names written on my roster, but I want to make sure that I pronounce

your name correctly. Names are very important and it is important to me to make sure that I say your names respectfully. When I read your name, please correct me so I can be sure I learn it the right way." - Aaric

Question 8:

Sean Watson 03:22 PM

*I'm assigned male at birth, live and present as "traditionally" masculine, but I personally don't feel like "man" really reflects my identity, even with still using he/him/his. How can we consider gender inclusivity in assessment and evaluation when pronouns may not be a perfect proxy for gender identity?*

Sean, what a great question! I think here is where gender categories are so important. Rather than using pronouns in assessment and evaluation tools, I highly recommend broadening the gender categories beyond "male" and "female." A quick Google search will provide you with plenty of gender categories, and I think you'd even find an option that is inclusive of someone who is assigned male at birth, live and present masculine, and does not feel that male is reflective of their gender identity. Happy to process this more with you. Feel free to reach out to me directly at [humis1jp@cmich.edu](mailto:humis1jp@cmich.edu). - Jon

Question 9:

Craig 03:22 PM

*We often ask students to self identify gender identity and/or sexual orientation in data collection. What are the correct qual/quan ways to: (a) pose questions that self-identify SO/GI, (b) report results (ex: reporting about small n's rather than grouping as "other"), and (c) use the data/results to effectively support/empower these students? [Or rather, how do we obtain/use data to support/empower without requiring students to self-identify?]*

I need to process this one because I think of ethical issues where institutions may ask questions about gender identity and or sexual orientation just to appear to be inclusive while there is no specific plan to take action on the results for these communities. However, in answering the last question, you simply include them as optional and allow the individual to decide whether or not to disclose or to self-identify. Feel free to reach out to me at [humis1jp@cmich.edu](mailto:humis1jp@cmich.edu) if you'd like to talk more about this. - Jon

Question 10:

Brittany Palasik (she/her/hers) 03:55 PM

*Are there any resources to help faculty/staff/students to practice or train? I work at an institution in Texas and there is a lot of use of sir and ma'am.*

I think I addressed this in the discussion. While I don't know that there are resources specifically established to help folks practice or train to shift their language, I highly suggest reaching out to the campus LGBTQ+ resource center or a colleague and work to create a space for this. - Jon

Question 11:

Jenay Robert 03:24 PM

*Can you please talk about appropriate ways to collect data about gender on large scale surveys? Thank you so much.*

Hi Jenay! A quick Google search will provide you with plenty of gender categories to use when collecting appropriate data on gender for large scale surveys. I have heard that the Common App does a pretty inclusive job with their gender categories. Happy to process this more with you. Feel free to reach out to me directly at [humis1jp@cmich.edu](mailto:humis1jp@cmich.edu). - Jon

Question 11:

Rebekah Bell 03:14 PM

*Part of the struggle with our remote learning situation is that our LMS will only display the student's legal name as captured in our registration database. This is a challenge for my students who are transitioning but have not legally changed their name. Do you have any recommendations about how to help with that problem? Beyond the obvious software overhaul*

Hi Rebekah,

Yes! This is definitely a frustrating part of virtual learning. I would recommend that faculty allow students to change their names in Zoom, or other platforms. The argument against this is that students will take advantage of doing that, and some may. But the impact on students who are forced to be in classes where they are consistently misgendered and deadnamed can be detrimental. I would also encourage working with students to make sure that their name is changed in Canvas (or other online learning platforms). At UW-Madison, we have the ability to capture names in use that are not legal yet. We also encourage students to reach out to their faculty members, and then document that they asked those faculty members to use their name correctly. If your campus has an LGBT Center, they might also have strategies and tips that are specific to your campus. - Aaric

Rebekah, I absolutely agree with Aaric. In lieu of a software overhaul, a campus procedure that maps out for students the things that they should do to have their names and pronouns recognized at the university should happen. Perhaps this could be accomplished by a group of committed faculty, staff, and students - and the end procedures could be housed on the LGBTQ Center's website. - Jon

Question 12:

Anonymous Attendee 03:47 PM

*Random Question: When we are doing mock interviews with students and they are going through a change in their gender but it has not officially changed; how do we conduct the interview? How should they introduce themselves?*

The best way to answer this question is to ask the student how they would like the situation handled and what makes them the most comfortable and then meet the student where they are at. I would encourage a career center to help the student explore the nondiscrimination policies of the companies they are exploring, so they will know beforehand whether or not they are protected from harassment and discrimination. - Jon

Hi! Aaric here. I would also add that it is important to update recommendations about dressing for interviews and moving away from the gender expression "rules" that exist in these spaces. There are a lot of career centers that have developed sections of their websites to specifically address LGBT students and address the unique needs of their job searching. I have led a few webinars with career development professionals over the past couple of years and would be happy to share my presentation with anyone who would be interested. Feel free to send me an email at [aaric.guerriero@wisc.edu](mailto:aaric.guerriero@wisc.edu) for that information.

Question 13:

Rebecca Turner 03:27 PM

*We often think about people in terms of "boxes" - race/ethnicity, SES, etc, as well as gender. What impact does a lack of ability to self-identify appropriately, or not being able to break out information in broader terms, have on the assessment process in higher education? In particular, how do we support those students best who may be included in boxes that are not correct?*

In my mind, this very question is the basis for why a campus climate study is so important - so we can address the specific impact on the lack of ability to self-identify. Not being able to self-identify may indicate to a transgender or nonbinary student that the institution does not see them or acknowledge their presence on campus or care about their needs. You being to support those students by working through the administrative channels to make change policies and practices and create opportunities for inclusion. In the meantime, you can help support those students who identify as transgender and nonbinary by providing them with information about the resources available to them on campus, how to navigate the politics of having their chosen name recognized, navigating existent or non-existent policies on campus (student/campus identification name change, registrar name change, residence hall policies, etc.). A campus climate study will help you get started with all of this. If you need a consultant

to conduct the study for you and your university, please reach out to me at [humis1jp@cmich.edu](mailto:humis1jp@cmich.edu). - Jon