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Getting beyond peeing and pronouns: living non-binary gender in higher education

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ABSTRACT

Non-binary people make up just over half the UK trans population and younger people are more likely to identify as non-binary than those over 35 . Despite this increasing recognition, non-binary identities and experiences continue to be widely misunderstood. Similarly, if university trans inclusion policies focus solely on models of binary or medical transition, they will not fully address the needs of non-binary students. In the context of an increased focus on the participation and success of marginalized social groups in higher education, and a social and political backlash against equality, diversity and inclusion work, questions of how non-binary students thrive in universities are pressing. Non-binary inclusion and experiences in higher education have received little dedicated attention. This article draws on data from the largest survey to date of non-binary students in the United Kingdom and begins to fill those gaps. We highlight the prominence in the survey of issues around 'peeing' and 'pronouns' in the lived experiences of non-binary students and demonstrate the detrimental impact of the lack of recognition on students' learning and lives at university. We conclude universities must get beyond 'peeing and pronouns' to reimagine higher education as an accessible and inclusive space.

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Non-binary; transgender; higher education; student experience

Figures released in January 2023 from the 2021 census contained, for the first time, data on the size of the trans and non-binary population of England and Wales. What this data demonstrated was not only that people with unspecified or non-binary genders made up 63% of the people with a gender identity different from the one assigned at birth, but that 85% of people specifically identifying as non-binary were aged 16–24 (Office for National Statistics ONS, 2023). This reconfirms previous surveys such as the 2018 National LGBT survey which also found that non-binary people make up just over half the trans population of the UK, and that younger people were more likely to identify as non-binary than those over 35 (Government Equalities Office, 2018). Despite this kind of increasing, but limited recognition, non-binary gender identities and experiences continue to be invalidated and widely misunderstood. Similarly, if university trans inclusion policies focus solely on models of binary or medical transition, they will not be able to fully address the needs of non-binary students. In the context of, on the one hand, an increased focus on the participation and success of marginalized social groups in higher education, and on the other hand, a social and political backlash

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against equality, diversity and inclusion work, questions of how non-binary students move through and thrive in universities become more pressing.

This article draws on survey data from the largest survey to date of non-binary students in the United Kingdom conducted as part of the Non-Binary in Higher Education (NBinHE) research project. Non-binary inclusion in higher education has thus far received little dedicated attention and as a consequence very little is known about the experiences and needs of non-binary people as they navigate higher education. Our data begin to fill those gaps, and in this article we engage the survey data to explore the realities and desires of being non-binary in higher education. Specifically, we focus on the themes of 'peeing' (the provision of gender-neutral toilets) and 'pronouns' (the desire to be addressed with one's chosen pronouns, names and titles) in participants' responses which shed light on the importance of recognition as a key issue. Against this we consider participants' knowledge of their universities' trans and non-binary inclusion policies and argue that those policies should not be the focus of university efforts to create learning environments in which non-binary students can thrive. However, we also argue if universities do not get beyond 'peeing and pronouns' they risk simplifying the complexities of non-binary experience, and neglecting the truly disruptive potential of non-binary gender for reimagining higher education as an accessible and inclusive space.

In recent years there has been a growing body of literature on trans student experiences in higher education (Beemyn, 2005; Bilodeau, 2005, 2009; Dugan et al., 2012; Goldberg et al., 2019; Nicolazzo, 2016, 2017; O'Riordan et al., 2023; Seelman, 2014; Storrie & Rohleder, 2018). These studies have opened an important field of inquiry into the accessibility of higher education for transgender, non-binary and gender diverse people. Understandably many of these studies have been based on relatively small, but in-depth samples (e.g. Bilodeau, 2009; Nicolazzo, 2017) and are based on work done in the United States. More significantly for us, they are not specifically focused on the experiences of non-binary students. Although we recognize there is no hard boundary between 'trans' and 'non-binary' experiences, indeed there is often significant overlap, there is little research on the multiple, complex and heterogeneous forms of non-binaryness and what that might mean for experiences of higher education. There is also a small body of research aimed at practical support for trans and non-binary people in higher education, or aimed at producing best practice in policy design (Lawrence & Mckendry, 2017; Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2018). Furthermore, there are significant resources available to institutions who wish to develop policies and inclusive cultures (Blaxter & Travis, 2019; Equality Challenge Unit, 2022; Stonewall, 2018a, 2018b, etc.). Within the UK the most extensive study of this kind was conducted by Lawrence and Mckendry (2019) as part of the TransEDU Research Project. Focused on Scotland, the project surveyed 157 trans and non-binary people in higher education, more than half of whom would fall under the non-binary 'umbrella'. Following Lawrence and Mckendry's work and the larger field, we identified the need for a study that both focused exclusively on non-binary student and staff experiences because they are not always generalizable under 'trans' experiences, and which surveyed participants across the UK. We also recognized the need for a study which would be large enough to indicate the systematicity of experiences, the range of ways people identify as non-binary, and the complexity of their experiences of erasure and affirmation within UK higher education institutions.

Methodological approach

We chose a survey as an initial method for this project in order to scope out the current lived experiences of non-binary people in higher education in the UK (see Benato et al., 2023 for a full report of survey findings). Our online survey was open for six weeks in the late spring of 2019. It was designed around three groups of participants: current students (foundation and certificate through PhD students) and recent graduates (within five years of graduating); PhD students who teach in addition to studying; and staff who teach. The decision to limit student participants to current students or relatively recent graduates was to capture students who would have begun

studying after the introduction of higher tuition fees in England and Wales in 2012. On the one hand we limited staff participants to those who teach because our larger project fits within the realm of learning and teaching and curricula, while on the other hand, we ensured that the staff category included any staff involved in teaching (e.g. academic staff, part-time or hourly-paid staff, learning developers, librarians and others). To ensure a strong sample we recruited participants through a snowballing method via email, social media, community groups and word of mouth.

In recruiting participants we made clear that we recognize that 'non-binary' is a contested and shifting term and we use it as an umbrella term to denote a range of gender identities which fall outside the male/female binary and that may or may not involve identifying as trans. We invited participants who understood themselves not as identifying wholly as one or other of the binary genders. This could include (but was not limited to) genderqueer, genderfluid, agender, bi-gender, pangender, androgynous, androgyne or neutrois.

The survey was designed in keeping with the queer politics that shape our project. All questions, apart from the participant consent question and the one asking how they were answering the survey (as student, staff etc), were optional. While this meant an additional layer of labour in analysing the data and also carried the risk that some questions would have very few answers, we wanted to ensure that our participants had control over what information they shared (Glick et al., 2018; Pearce, 2020; Vincent, 2018; Vivienne et al., 2021). Survey questions were divided into discrete areas: About you; About your studies and/or teaching; About your institution; Networks at your University; Navigating your gender in your studies and/or work; and Non-binary genders at university. Each section used a combination of open, scaled and multiple-choice style questions. We chose to have open answer boxes for questions around gender and sexual identity as well as race and ethnicity. When analysing the data this resulted in 93 codes for gender identity, 51 for sexual identity and 48 for ethnicity, all which reveal the beautiful complexity of how non-binary people understand themselves. The decision to create a space for people to self-identify in these areas came from a combination of our lived experience (and that of friends, colleagues, students, partners and lovers) of filling in surveys in which we were forced to choose a box that did not fit and our commitment to attempting to create a survey which would allow participants to feel seen and heard. Where we found that current language and terminology was inadequate to formulate questions as we would have wished we also included an explanatory note for participants so our decision-making process could be as transparent as possible.

Over the six-week period that the survey was open we received 367 responses from: 277 students (current and alumni), 30 PhD students who teach, and 60 staff who teach. The data in this paper only draws on the responses from the students and PhD students ($n = 307$) in keeping with the theme of this Special Issue.

Being non-binary in HE: realities and desires

Our survey asked several questions designed to establish how students were and were not able to be non-binary in various ways. We asked who they were open with about their gender identity in their lives outside the university (see Table 1). What we found was that overwhelmingly students were open with friends and lovers/partners, and more than half with family, acquaintances and colleagues outside of university. This suggests that students are able to be open about their non-binary identities in their everyday lives, and are able to 'be' non-binary in certain social spaces.

We then asked students whether they had been able to be open about their gender identity with their teachers or supervisors at university (see Table 2). While answers to this question indicate that a narrow majority of students, and a larger proportion of PhD students are able to be at least partially open with their university teachers and supervisors, the percentages are considerably lower, and in contrast to, their openness in peer groups. The shockingly low percentage of students (20.1%) able to be fully open, alongside the varying ability of participants to be open with even some teachers,

Table 1. Who are you open with about your gender identity outside of the university?

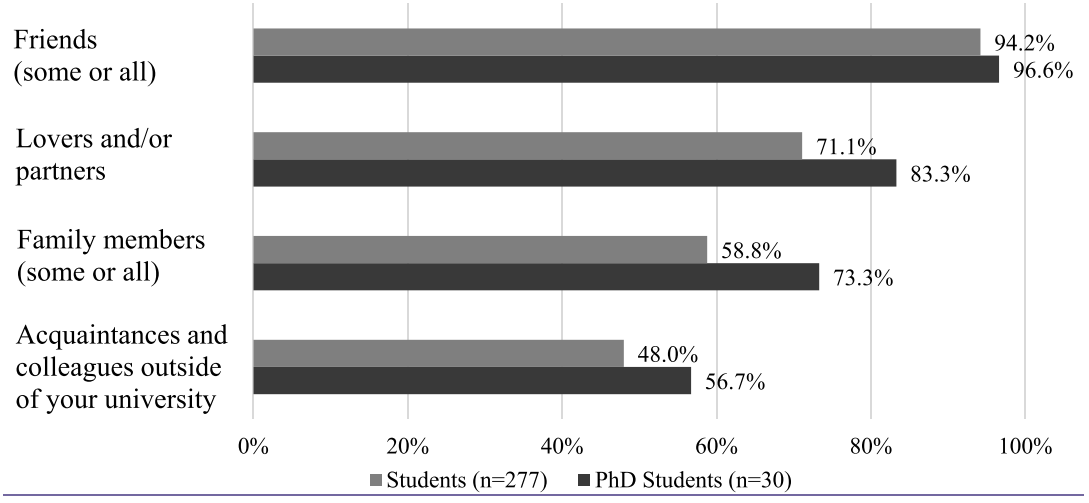
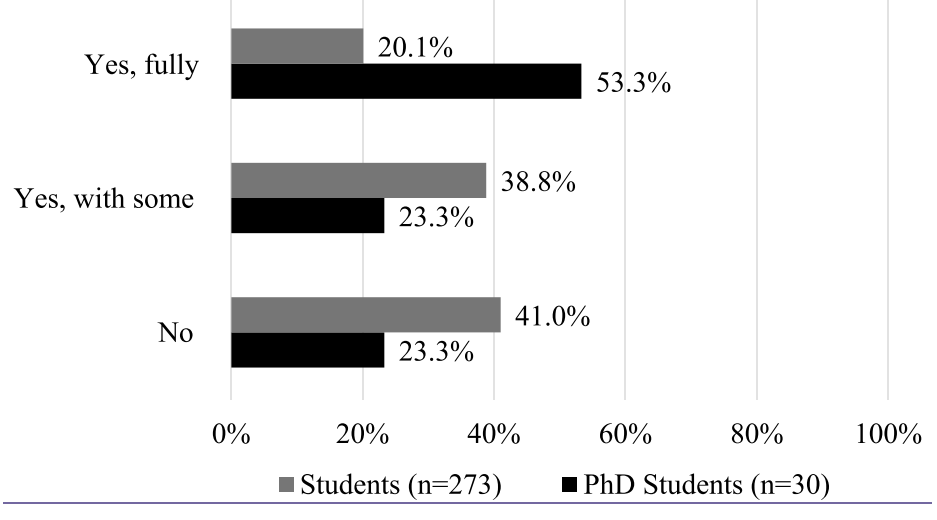


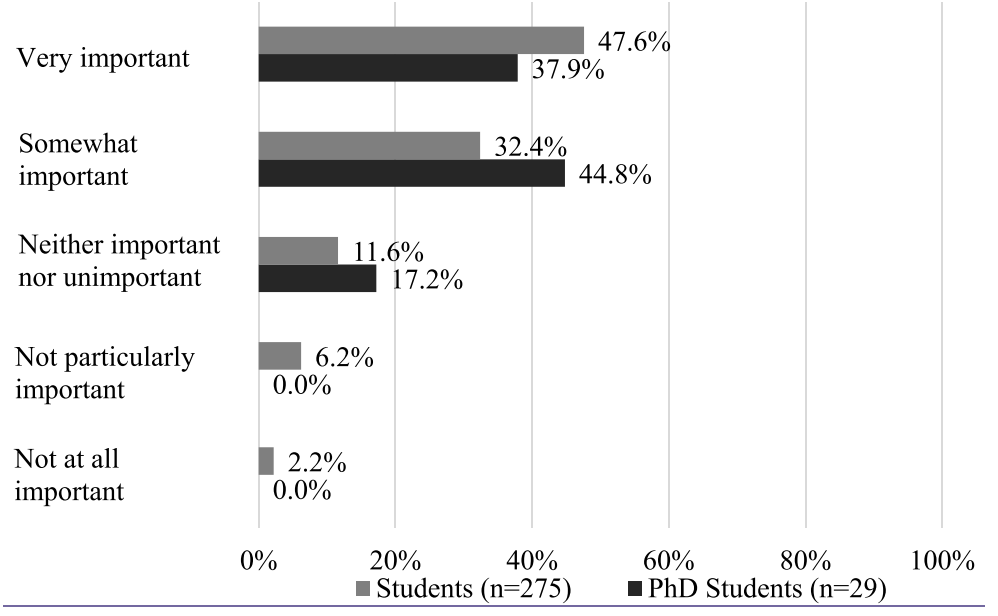
Table 2. Have you been able to be open with your teachers/research supervisors about your gender?



suggests that university is not a place students experience as somewhere they can be openly non-binary, and also be identified and treated as non-binary.

To understand the significance of this data we also asked participants how important to them it was that people at the university knew their gender and treated them accordingly (see Table 3). The results for this question indicate that this is important to some degree to more than three quarters of students. In other words, their preference would to be able to be open about their gender identity at university, whereas the reality is that far fewer are actually able to do this. Perhaps more tellingly too, fewer than 10% of students attach little or no importance to this at all, making it fair to say that non-binary students do desire their gender to be known and acknowledged within the university. These results suggest that for many students there continues to be a recognition gap (Miller, 2019), between how they understand themselves and how the institution and individuals within the institution engage with them.

Table 3. Is it important that people at the university know your gender and treat you accordingly?



If the desire for students to have their gender known and acknowledged is established by the survey, the next question is how students imagine, or have experienced, the form this acknowledgement takes. The survey data that address this question come from three parts of the survey, questions on doing 'life admin' at university, and questions that asked participants to describe moments when they felt their gender had been validated or erased. The responses to these questions will be discussed in the following sections, and as per the title of this article, we have highlighted the two key areas that students made frequent reference to in the survey which were the provision of gender-neutral toilets (and other facilities), and the ability or not to be referred to by the correct pronouns, names, titles and gender markers, both in classroom interactions and on their university student records.

Peeing: the provision of gender-neutral toilets

The survey directly asked participants whether their institution had specific gender-neutral toilets, that is, toilets specifically designated as gender neutral, not disability or accessible toilets that have been appropriated for multiple uses. We asked this question generally and so have not gathered data about whether toilets were in university or Student Union buildings. 277 Students responded to the question with 172 (62.1%) indicating yes; 86 (31%) no; and 19 (6.9%) that they did not know. A further 30 PhD students responded with 19 (63.3%) indicating yes; 10 (33.3%) no; and 1 (3.3%) that they did not know. Despite the prominence of this issue the data show almost a third of participants' universities still do not have gender-neutral toilets. Where these facilities were available, we also wanted to find out how adequate they were, so we asked whether the gender-neutral toilets were easy to find. We received 167 responses from students. Of these 90 (53.9%) answered yes and 77 (46.1%) answered no. A further 17 PhD students responded with 6 (35.5%) answering yes and 11 (64.7%) answering no. Finally, we asked participants whether the gender-neutral toilets were adequately signed. We received 167 responses from students of which 45 (26.9%) answered yes, always; 85 (50.9%) yes, sometimes; 29 (17.4%) no; and 8 (4.8%) I have not noticed. A further 19 PhD students responded of which 4 (21.1%) answered yes, always; 10 (52.6%) yes, sometimes; 3 (15.8%)

no; 2 (10.5%) I have not noticed. The lower response rate here reflects the students who could not answer these follow up questions because their campuses already have no gender-neutral toilets. The data from these questions, however, reveal that even when there are toilets available, the experience of using them is not adequate, either they are not easy to find or not signed well.

While toilets may have been technically available for some participants there are significant issues around this provision in terms of accessibility. In the sections of the survey where we asked participants to describe moments at university where their gender felt validated, there were remarkably few comments about toilets, just eight mentions in 164 (146 students; 19 PhD students) total responses. One participant said,

> We (the LGBT+ soc committee) managed to get them to relabel some bathrooms as gender neutral and the second time ever I used one I had the realisation that I was allowed to be there just as much as the cis people that use it, and it was no one gender's bathroom, no one could discriminate against someone else, including me, being there, it was great.

For this student the experience of using facilities specifically designated gender neutral allowed them to feel a sense of belonging and entitlement to take up that space. The fact they were also instrumental in creating that space is not incidental and reflects the labour non-binary students (and staff) often undertake to lobby for changes in their own institutions. Another student, however, felt validated by staff undertaking this labour for them prior to arrival,

> Before I arrived in the department there were two single stall toilets that had been designated 'male' and 'female'; the summer before I arrived, department staff re-designated both of those toilets gender neutral, because they knew that they were going to have a non-binary student in the next academic year.

Here, the sense of validation is only partly to do with the provision of the toilets themselves, and more related to the effort put in by staff to make sure this student was accommodated and included.

Indeed, it is an intriguing aspect of our data that the presence of gender-neutral toilets (which 62.1% of students reported were available to them) was not what came to mind for participants when considering moments of validation. We might speculate that this is because the toilets provided are not that validating. As one student noted, 'Being able to not think about it and just use a toilet would make my mental health better' which may indicate that students would rather not have to feel anything about using a toilet than single it out as a particularly validating moment for their gender identity.

It is unsurprising then that in the data from the question asking about moments where students felt their gender was erased or invalidated there were far more mentions of toilets, suggesting that the absence of appropriate toilets definitely is something which prompts students to think of their invisibility or lack of recognition within the university. Many made the clear link between a total lack of gender-neutral toilets and erasure, for example a PhD student responded,

> I was out as non-binary, and my research was on non-binary issues, but I would have to use the women's or disabled bathroom. It felt embarrassing every time a colleague saw you use either.

Others said, 'The lack of gender-neutral toilets made me feel invalidated', or 'for most of my time here there haven't been gender-neutral toilets'. An absence of gender-neutral toilets very clearly symbolizes for students that they are erased, that their gender identity is not known, acknowledged or expected in their universities.

For others, the struggles around toilets involved not a total absence of toilets, but inadequate provision. For example, one student said,

> There's also a real lack of gender-neutral toilet provision across the campus. Toilets in a couple of buildings isn't enough. When I raised this as an issue I was given the code to a gendered (woman's bathroom) toilet. Not really a solution eh.

Another similarly reported,

> Gender-neutral toilets being combined with the disabled toilets to form an 'all access' toilet, which doesn't particularly help anyone, there are buildings on campus which have no gender neutral toilets and so I consistently have to go out of my way to use a gender-neutral toilet.

Indeed, the criticism of, as one participant put it, 'Disabled toilets getting a gender-neutral sign slapped on them as an afterthought' was frequent. Several others reported having to walk to other buildings, or there being only one out-of-the-way toilet they could use on a campus. What this suggests is that although a majority of students may technically have gender-neutral toilets at their universities, using them is far from convenient, let alone validating and in some cases highlights how little effort has been put into recognizing and respecting their identities and needs.

Pronouns: the desire to be addressed with one's chosen pronouns, names and titles

Alongside toilets, pronouns, and other gender appropriate language (names, titles, gender markers) were prominent in the survey results as central to students' desires and efforts to be known and seen as non-binary. The survey asked specifically about non-binary 'life admin' at students' institutions – 'life admin' being the more formal processes of changing names or genders with university registries or other services. There were 138 responses to the question 'Is there any non-binary "life administration" that you have wanted to do at your institution that you have been unable to do?' The overwhelming response was that students wanted to but were unable to indicate an appropriate gender marker (students $n = 31$; PhD students $n = 5$) or pronouns (students $n = 55$; PhD students $n = 5$) on their student record. Respondents also indicated an inability to have an appropriate title, for example Mx, or to remove their title altogether (students $n = 22$; PhD students $n = 4$). A further 45 respondents (students $n = 40$; PhD students $n = 5$) were unable to change their name and/or indicate a preferred name. The other finding that emerged from this question reveals respondents' frustrations with inconsistent university systems, for example where registry, IT, health services and departments had different rules, regulations or willingness to record or use correct names and/or pronouns (students $n = 24$; PhD students $n = 1$).

It is clear from these initial findings that many universities are failing to provide administrative systems that can accommodate non-binary students' needs. The fact that some students reported they were able to change names, titles and add pronouns to their student records or they had 'no problems' doing life admin ($n = 18$), indicates that this is something which is possible – it is not beyond systems to add more categories, or universities to choose to do this. To not do it can be construed as a failure by institutions to create equitable experiences. However, the qualitative data from the survey reveals the knock-on impacts of institutions' administrative choices, but also a more complex set of issues around pronouns, in particular, where they operate as a proxy for non-binary recognition within the university. These are issues which will require more than minor amendments to the student records system to resolve.

In answers to the question about non-binary life admin they wanted to do, but could not, respondents reported a range of experiences around their interactions and negotiations with university administration. Many students reported that while they were technically able to change names/pronouns in the system, this did not automatically mean they were able to do so in practice. Some changed their details in university systems, but it did not translate in use. For example,

> Despite the fact that before arriving at my institution I asked for my name and gender marker to be changed, my old name and gender marker still regularly appear.

> I've been able to indicate a name I wish to be called by, but this has been almost universally ignored and my birth name (which is strongly gendered to my assigned gender) is used by nearly every aspect of the university.

Others, perhaps cognizant of the types of experiences reported above, were wary of entering into making administrative changes, for example one student who said, 'honestly, asking for pronoun changes is entirely *possible*, I've just heard from a lot of people that it makes enough trouble that

it's best not to bother'. Some had not tried due to, 'general administrative exhaustion', again a sense that it would require excessive labour on the part of the student. Others who might have undertaken that labour, chose not to for other reasons, for example the student who said,

> I have been unable to make any administration changes due to uncertainty about how this would affect my communications with the university and whether I would inadvertently be outed to my family by my communications with them.

One student on a professional course feared the stigma attached to changing pronouns, while others were just afraid to change their details or ask tutors to use the correct pronouns:

> I don't feel safe asking people to use my pronouns.

> I was too scared to approach about name or pronoun changes. I would not have known who to go to or what the process was and was scared to ask tutors about it.

Although this question in the survey was intended to address structural aspects of the institution (e.g. registries), in the responses participants frequently brought up interactions with tutors and teaching staff. Multiple responses referred to these interactions, for example:

> I can ask my tutor to use my correct pronoun, but they don't.

> It took a lot of wrangling to get my gender marker changed. It is still difficult to get tutors to refer to me using the appropriate pronouns.

In particular respondents wanted to be able to change their pronouns in a system so that they did not have to have these painful, and often failed, interactions with tutors:

> [I want to] change my pronouns so I don't have to come out to every new lecturer, supervisor and tutor.

> I wish there was a way to put pronouns on file so lecturers would use the right ones without me having to make a fuss.

These responses highlight the gap between policy and practice, and suggest that what is required is cultural change not more policy.

Interactions with staff and fellow students also came up in the survey data outside of the questions about university related administration and official student records. This is unsurprising given that pronouns figure most prominently in relationships with others, rather than administrative systems, so students' accounts of their everyday experiences reveal the role of pronouns in students' abilities to feel like their gender is known and recognized. What was clear from the data was that whether students' experiences were positive or negative, getting tutors, and other students, to use the correct pronouns was always something that had to be navigated, and which required a degree of labour, struggle or attention in ways that other students never have to worry about. Beyond this emotional labour, students' experiences with pronouns were extremely varied and where toilets were a symbol of erasure but rarely validation, correct use of pronouns featured more heavily as both a source of validation and erasure.

Most students felt validated in their gender when their pronouns were used consistently by tutors, and where tutors created a space where specifying pronouns was possible and encouraged. For example, students offered these examples of moments of validation:

> Having a lecturer who introduced themselves with their name and they/them pronouns during their first class, and proceeded to end each email with their pronouns.

> When I asked my tutor to respect my pronouns, and they said yes, I understand.

> When my personal tutor noticed that I had changed my name, title and preferred sex on my record, she called me into her office and asked if she could help at all. She offered to email my faculty administrator asking her to send an email to all relevant faculty staff notifying them of my preferred pronouns, which is something I would have been too nervous to do otherwise.

> Friends and Lecturers defending my pronouns when I'm not present. Lecturers checking with me about where is safe to use my pronouns etc.

On the other hand, students experienced erasure when the opposite happened:

> My tutor consistently talks about me and gives me written feedback with the wrong pronouns.
>
> My English Language lecturers not believing in singular they.
>
> Being misgendered repeatedly in an email about my nonbinary focused dissertation.
>
> Several lecturers used the wrong pronouns for me, most did not ask or default to gender-neutral pronouns when they didn't know someone's pronouns. Peers frequently misgender me and use the wrong pronouns.
>
> Being told by a lecturer that I look like a girl so she can't use my name or pronouns.

Whether these experiences were validating or invalidating they tended to occur in interactions with other students and staff, rather than in interactions with the university as an institution. This begins to reveal questions about the role of university policies versus culture change which we discuss in the next section.

Policies

UK universities have tended to address questions of trans inclusion and gender diversity through policy to comply with statutory requirements set out in the Gender Recognition Act (2004) and the Equality Act (2010). We anticipated that participant responses in our survey would include things that could be potentially addressed in these policies. We therefore asked: Does your institution have a policy that addresses trans issues? This could be a specific trans inclusion policy or an equality and diversity type policy. Of the 276 student responses 126 (46.6%) indicated yes; 17 (6.2%) no; and a further 131 (47.5%) I don't know. Of the 30 PhD student responses 8 (44.4%) indicated yes; 3 (16.7%) no; and a further 12 (40%) I don't know. To participants who answered yes, we also asked if the policy included non-binary genders. Here there were 125 student responses of which 48 (38.4%) indicated yes; 11 (8.8%) no; and 66 (52.8%) I don't know. There were also 18 PhD student responses of which 9 (44.4%) indicated yes; 3 (16.7%) no; and 7 (38.9%) I don't know. What these responses make clear is that almost half of student participants, regardless of level of study, were unaware of the existence, let alone the content, of their institution's policy. For the other almost half of students, policy does not seem to feature as an important element in their journeys through their institutions. There was scant commentary on policies in the qualitative sections of the survey. It was more likely to be raised where students became involved in the Students' Union or in equality, diversity and inclusion work in their institution. However, it was clear in the qualitative data that students did not relate either their validating or erasing experiences to the existence or not of policy. Perhaps this lends support to Nicolazzo's (2017) argument that we need to move beyond best practice as a solution: 'to provide a list of best practices becomes a gilded experiment that provides the veneer of progress regarding trans* inclusion but may in its very existence cover up practices, attitudes and an overall ethos of trans* exclusion' (p. 140). What this suggests to us is that we need to look at the impact on students of these experiences.

Impacts of validation and erasure

In an open question we specifically asked participants to share what the impacts of experiences of validation and erasure were for their studies or teaching. 174 participants responded (students n = 156 and PhD students n = 18). Overwhelmingly they shared negative impacts (n = 142), though there were some reports of positive changes (n = 12), and a number who reported mixed impacts (n = 20).

We coded the responses against four areas: physical impacts; impact on learning; impact on student life; and impact on decisions about the future.

Physical impacts related specifically to the provision of toilets. In line with our other findings none of the participants reported positive impacts around toilet provision. They did however report physical discomfort resulting from avoiding campus toilets, which also then led to being distracted in their studies. Others reported that they avoided drinking water while on campus out of fear of needing a toilet. We can only infer the knock-on impact that this had on their studies and general health.

Participants shared a range of negative impacts in relation to learning. These ranged from lower attendance and engagement through a lack of focus on studies and difficulties in learning, all of which impacted their grades.

> I just study from books and don't engage in any other way.
>
> It makes it more difficult to fully engage with my studies as it doesn't feel like a safe or supportive environment.
>
> I have to spend a lot of energy making sure my gender is respected which I should be spending on my studies.
>
> Feeling uncomfortable in university spaces has made it harder to concentrate on working, and lack of acceptance has decreased my motivation to try to meet the standards of the university.
>
> When tutors have made transphobic comments during tutorials, it's prevented me from contributing to the rest of the session because I'm upset and anxious about whether it was aimed at me - even one throw-away comment can make things feel very hostile and uncomfortable.

Importantly, this impact was not simply for the individual non-binary student. It also had an impact on other students in the teaching situation:

> It definitely makes me feel resentful and more detached from the class process. We are supposed to be empathetic and open in our group and its hard when I get misgendered and both I and the rest of the group tense up when my wrong pronouns are used.
>
> When visiting lecturers would make assumptions about the gender make up of the group I would often zone out for a lot of the lecture being cross with them. I imagine it affected others in the group too. One person said to me once 'we either embarrass them or you are left feeling awful, it's a lose lose situation'.

Conversely, when students felt supported and validated they shared the positive impacts on their studies. This was especially the case in relation to research or subject choices.

> Enabled me to have meaningful conversations relating to my studies e.g. non-discriminatory practice in youth work.
>
> In general I feel a lot more at ease here than I did in my prior education as I've never had to 'come out' or explain my identity, which has helped relieve stress and has likely improved my learning as a result.

The third area of impact that we identified was on student life. Here we saw a very mixed set of impacts. For example, some students reported not being able to join in activities (academic, social or sporting). Others recounted that experiences of erasure led them to withdraw from contact with others, or that they did not get more involved in activities because they felt there was no place for them. However, responses also indicated that both the negative and positive experiences motivated students to become involved in their Students' Union, to engage in advocacy and to be involved in equality, diversity and inclusion related activities.

> Validation has helped me feel included within the university community and has helped me to establish a strong and confident sense of identity that I have never had before in my life.
>
> It's made me want to speak up a lot more about gender, nonbinary genders specifically, so that other students won't have to go through this in the future.

> Often [it] means being an institutional nuisance and asking awkward questions in EDI meetings (I'm on the committee) and pushing for change.

Finally, participants shared that experiences of validation and erasure had significant, and frequently negative, impacts on their futures beyond the university.

> I have had to take an interruption year.

> Mostly I left uni with the sense that I would never be able to have my gender recognised or validated in any work or 'official' situation, only in social situations with people who were 'woke' about social justice.

> I left my phd about a year ago and haven't felt like I could come out in my workplace afterwards.

> I decided I didn't want to continue onto a PhD because I felt academia wasn't for me.

> I also felt the most validated I ever have and finding a community of like-minded individuals who supported me in my identity made me so much more confident in who I am and how normal/beautiful non-binary genders are. This pushed me to take a specific direction with my studies, particularly my dissertation, which allowed me to be passionate about it and do well.

Clearly, the impacts on students are complex and multifaceted. They are felt across students' lives within the university and beyond it.

Conclusions

Throughout this article we have shared the stories and experiences of our 307 non-binary student participants in order to show what it is like at the sharp edge of inclusion discourses in higher education. This reveals the ways in which the seemingly straightforward issues of 'peeing and pronouns' are complex and not easily solved through technical 'fixes' or policy. For example, while toilets should be a relatively simple part of university infrastructure, they are sites of significant erasure for non-binary students. This was especially important for participants with intersecting toilet-related needs, and with significant implications for students' health and ability to participate in university life. Another significant finding of the survey was that it was in interactions with fellow students or with staff that participants either found their place in the university or became further marginalized, with significant, usually detrimental, impacts on their learning. Seemingly small things, such as using a student's chosen name or pronouns, usually in classroom or other interpersonal interactions, set the tone for their overall experience in the institution. Finally, the 93 different formulations of non-binary gender used by participants in our survey reveal the incredible variety of ways that people understand and live their gender in higher education. The implications of this for universities are significant. Our participants demonstrate that non-binary students cannot be shoe-horned into existing facilities, policies or programmes. Rather, universities need a more thorough reimagining in order to create spaces in which non-binary students can learn and thrive.

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