Beyond the Binary: The Transgender Experience at CSB+SJU

StellaRae Ambord  
*College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University*

Rachel Lawrence  
*College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University*

Rylie Owen  
*College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/ur_cscday](https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/ur_cscday)

Part of the Gender Equity in Education Commons, Higher Education Commons, and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies Commons

**Recommended Citation**
Ambord, StellaRae; Lawrence, Rachel; and Owen, Rylie, "Beyond the Binary: The Transgender Experience at CSB+SJU" (2024). *Celebrating Scholarship and Creativity Day (2018-)*. 238.  
[https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/ur_cscday/238](https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/ur_cscday/238)

This Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Celebrating Scholarship and Creativity Day (2018-) by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@CSB/SJU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csbsju.edu.
BEYOND THE BINARY: The Transgender Experience at CSB+SJU

StellaRae Ambord (she/her), Rachel Lawrence (she/her), and Rylie Owen (they/them)

Hynes Cohort | 2024
DEFINITIONS

Transgender
Someone who doesn't identify with their sex assigned at birth

Cisgender
Someone who does identify with their sex assigned at birth.
OVERVIEW

• The survey was open and marketed to all students, regardless of their gender identity
• Results and answers were anonymous
• The only required question was the student's gender
• Students could add their email address for follow-up if they chose
RESPONSE OVERVIEW

231 Responses Collected

- Transgender: 5.6%
- Cisgender: 94.4%

- SJU: 37.8%
- CSB: 62.2%
OBJECTIVES

Examine CSB+SJU campus culture toward and experiences for transgender students.

Develop implementable goals for CSB+SJU, the IWL, and individuals to create an accepting environment.
BENNIE-JOHNniej BINARY

"What does it mean to you to be a Bennie or a Johnnie?"
"Separation. It enforces the traditional ideologies of male and female. While leaving out the space for those who identify differently. You see the labels on bathrooms, mugs, even the t-shirt you get when you are excepted into the school. Not to mention the separation of living on campuses"
"To be a bennie or johnnie to me sometimes feels like a cop-out to the work the institution could be doing. Instead of doing away with sex-based campuses, they are putting that under a more "inclusive" (as they say) title that still harbors the same problems. It's the linkage of bennie = women and johnie = man that I think needs to be looked at closer."
"For me, Bennie and Johnnie have distinct separate meanings that are correlated with gender. As a cisgender woman, I do not feel like the Johnnie label would ever apply to me, and always identify myself as a Bennie"
"To be a bennie or johnnie means to identify with our campus community. However, I do tend to think of bennies as female and johnnies as male, and I think most people would also make this assumption. I do think it is harder for nonbinary/trans students here at CSBSJU than at most institutions because of the nature of our housing and because of the bennie/johnnie labeling system"
GENDER DISCRIMINATION

**Transgender**
- Yes: 58.3%
- No* 16.7%
- No 25%

**Cisgender**
- Yes: 25.1%
- No 74.9%

Hynes Cohort | 2024
GENDER DISCRIMINATION

"As a lower-income student, I did not have the luxury to pick where I wanted to go. I ended up at CSB+SJU due to financial reasons and did not want to come here due to its binary. I wanted to attend a co-ed university where I knew I wouldn't feel so out of place."

"Just misgendering. I'm surprised I haven't been called a slur yet. There are some people here that I get a demeaning vibe from. "

Hynes Cohort | 2024
GENDER DISCRIMINATION

"I didn't think that the divide between 'schools' - and therefore 'genders' would be so big. I tried to leave tbh but none of my credits would transfer and I didn't wanna start my major over again."

"Gender expression- I have been looked at weirdly and my pronouns are not respected much... Only handful of people CSBSJU haven't made me feel uncomfortable"
Question Asked:
How do you perceive campus culture towards transgender students?
ANTI-TRANS BIAS

"There is only two genders."

“I honestly don't personally know how I'd go about the situation of transgender students. Personally, as a women, I would feel extremely uncomfortable if a transgender women lived near me. Not for any bias or ill-intent, but I just don't think I'd feel 100%, completely comfortable with that.”

“[The IWL] should support that your either a male or female.”
ANTI-TRANS BIAS

“I think that many of the requirements and classes that are needed to graduate force nonbinary/transgender upon students.”

“Very warm and welcoming, however as a catholic school I don't think we should be allowing men to live in the women's dorms and women to live in men's dorms just because they identify as another gender.”
ANTI-TRANS BIAS

“I think that often time they receive special treatment and shouldn't be allowed to pick whatever campus they live on or bathroom they use. God made each one of us either a boy or a girl and it should be respected in that way. Shouldn't be able to pick and choose because of confusion.”

“I ignore them.”
WHY SHOULD WE CARE?

Even with the low percentage of transgender students at CSBSJU, it is still crucial to foster a welcoming and accepting community.

"It feels like trans and non-binary experiences aren't given the same thought, especially in residential spaces . . . [and it feels like] their identities [are] tacked on as an afterthought."

Hynes Cohort | 2024
RECOMMENDATIONS
INSTITUTIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Creating Safe Spaces
- Create a transgender space at SJU
- Mandate Safe Space training for all students, faculty, and staff

Housing & Restrooms
- Offer LGBTQ+ specific housing options on both campuses
- Provide a CSB+SJU sponsored map of all gender-neutral restrooms on both campuses
# INSTITUTIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

## CSB
- 42 unisex bathrooms (42 stalls)
- 97 sex-segregated bathrooms (at least 291 stalls)

## SJU
- 27 unisex bathrooms (27 stalls)
- 97 sex-segregated bathrooms (at least 291 stalls)

Source: Owen, Rylie G., "The Issue of Gender Exclusivity at CSB+SJU."

Hynes Cohort | 2024
INSTITUTIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

"Sex-segregated restrooms represent one institutional feature that excludes trans people and/or exposes them to harassment, which causes them significant stress."

- Abbie Goldberg

Source: Goldberg, Abbie E. "Transgender Students in Higher Education."

Hynes Cohort | 2024
INSTITUTIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

"These campuses are historically divided by sex, the very basis on which we as trans people find ourselves balancing, and this direct split completely erases us. I have been called 'she' more times than I can count by people who just don't get it. The anti-trans bias comes from our system more than it does specific people, so the transphobia here is quiet. Here we also have what I like to call the 'rural sentiment' . . . "

Hynes Cohort | 2024
INSTITUTIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

"... Due to many of our students being local and growing up in a Catholic environment, transness seems like a 'woke' radical reinvention of the self (and ultimately confusing and unreal). It makes more sense for everyone here to be contained within their specific gendered markers, look male or female, and conform. I appreciate that we have a varied amount of people from all walks of life on this campus, but they ultimately feel snuffed out by a small city in a red county at a school in the middle of nowhere."

Hynes Cohort | 2024
IWL RECOMMENDATIONS

Marketing & Communications
- Change the name to be inclusive of all genders (i.e. Institute for Bennie Leadership)
- Use social media and other promotions to raise awareness of transgender issues

Events & Collaborations
- Collaborate with other organizations, such as Q+
- Create and plan more events focused on transgender issues
"Organizations on campus should allow trans/nb students space to express themselves rather than having their identities tacked on as an afterthought.

Hynes Cohort | 2024
"Sometimes I feel like I am not wanted or invited to IWL events, sometimes just because of my gender expression. It feels like because I am not a 'woman' I am not wanted there, even though I am a Bennie and I am AFAB."

Hynes Cohort | 2024
INDIVIDUAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Take Accountability
- Educate yourself on trans identities and struggles
- Listen to transgender voices

Self-Reflection
- Consider any internal biases you may have
- Work past tolerance towards acceptance

Hynes Cohort | 2024
"I think awareness, acceptance, and proper knowledge can solve a lot of problems. The real issue I'd say is the unwillingness of people to learn"

"Share more stories of students who feel comfortable, as well as educate those who are not aware"
TOLERANCE VS ACCEPTANCE

**Tolerance** of a person is the willingness to accept behavior and beliefs that are different from your own, although you might not agree with or approve of them.

**Acceptance** of a person is the act of agreeing to that person's becoming a member of an organization or group, or to that person's belonging to your group as an equal.
Questions?