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Between the Noise and Silence: An Autoethnography Challenging Schools of Social Work to Evolve for Trans Students

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Social work programs have been largely silent in the face of legislative attacks on transgender/nonbinary (TGNB or “trans”) communities across the U.S., which signals to TGNB students that they may not be supported in their respective programs. Consequently, TGNB students, staff, and faculty shoulder the burden to advocate for change within social work academic institutions and to speak out about violence perpetrated against TGNB communities. Using our voices as two trans doctoral students and a queer cisgender associate professor, we employed collaborative and critical autoethnography to share insights about the impact of this burden on TGNB social work students and their mentors. These burdens take the shape of gender and race “noise,” invisibility and abandonment, and the need to scavenge for resources and community. We end with a discussion and recommendations to recruit, retain, and support TGNB graduate students as they matriculate through schools of social work.

Keywords: Transgender, nonbinary, graduate education, social work education, doctoral student, intersectionality

Schools of social work impress upon students the importance of following the National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) Code of Ethics (2021), cultural diversity, and cultural attunement (Jackson & Samuels, 2019) and yet they have failed transgender/non-binary (TGNB or "trans") students in a myriad of ways. Social work programs have been largely silent in the face of legislative attacks on TGNB communities across the nation, which signals to students that they are not supported as TGNB people in their respective institutions. These feelings are reinforced by interpersonal exchanges TGNB social work students have within their programs, including microaggressions (Turner et al., 2018; Witt & Medina-Martinez, 2022), misgendering, stigma, exclusion, and transphobia (Austin et al., 2019; Goldberg et al., 2019a, 2019b). When cissexism and transphobia continue unchecked within schools of social work, TGNB students are denied support that is typically afforded to graduate students, placing them at risk for attrition and delays in identity development and career advancement (Goldberg et al., 2019b). As a result, TGNB and allied students, staff, and faculty shoulder the burden to advocate for change within our institutions and speak out about violence perpetrated against our communities. For Black, Indigenous and other TGNB students and faculty of color, this workload is compounded in the face of heterosexism, cissexism, and white supremacy.

Using our voices as two trans doctoral students and a queer cisgender associate professor, we utilized collaborative and critical autoethnography to discuss myriad challenges within schools of social work on TGNB students and their mentors. These burdens may take the shape of "noise," otherwise known as a TGNB person's persistent awareness of their race and/or gender identity that results in a constant burden to manage information related to identity. Burden may also take the shape of invisibility, abandonment, or the need to scavenge for resources and community. To guide future efforts to recruit, retain, and support TGNB graduate students as they matriculate through schools of social work, we end with a discussion and recommendations for social work programs and our leading national social work organizations.

Anti-TGNB Sociopolitical Climates

Steinmetz's (2014) *Time* magazine article, "The Transgender Tipping Point," marked the height of unprecedented visibility for TGNB people due in large part to more TGNB people coming out publicly, as well as increased media representation of TGNB people and issues. Unfortunately, heightened visibility was followed by a wave of anti-trans legislation that has swept across the U.S. in recent years. Following a continued upward trend, in 2022 legislators introduced more than 230 bills and signed 25 into law (Lang, 2022; Lavietes & Ramos, 2022). Some of the harshest legislation even banned or criminalized provision of medically necessary care for TGNB youth (United States Department of Justice, 2022). In Arizona, where the authors reside, legislators proposed 17 anti-LGBTQ bills, 12 of which were specifically anti-trans, and passed three bills that restricted access to equitable education, athletic opportunities, health care, and legal rights for TGNB youth (Freedom for All Americans, 2022).

The hostile sociopolitical environment for TGNB communities in Arizona was identified as a grave concern to many emerging and current scholars as they considered attending the 2023 Society for Social Work and Research annual conference held in Phoenix, Arizona (Society for Social Work Research, 2022). Some academics called on the conference committee to change the location, while others chose to boycott and send financial support to local TGNB organizations instead. The decision about attending was a particularly heavy burden for TGNB doctoral students who are expected to participate in these activities as they establish themselves as scholars and prepare for the looming job market ahead.

Anti-TGNB Microaggressions and Exclusion

The burden on TGNB students to navigate the impact of legislation and institutional inaction is compounded by ongoing isolation and challenges to community building in academia. Anti-trans sentiments leech into daily interactions, as microaggressions stemming from cisheteronormativity and transphobia remain present in social work (Witt & Medina-Martinez, 2022). Microaggressions are indirect everyday verbal and behavioral expressions of insults

or slights that many gender, sexual, racial, and ethnic minorities face in academic spaces (Byers et al., 2020; Sue et al., 2009). TGNB students experience microaggressions ranging from social exclusion, to misgendering, and outward displays of faculty discomfort (Austin et al., 2019). Related to faculty inaction, a qualitative study on affirmative social work education found that TGNB students were more likely to introduce transgender-related content in the classroom than were their instructors. When instructors did cover these topics, they were not knowledgeable enough to teach them effectively, often placing an expectation on TGNB students to be the classroom experts (Austin et al., 2016). The constant noise of microaggressions places unnecessary burdens on TGNB students to provide subject matter expertise and advocacy within institutions while simultaneously attending to their own academic, personal, relational, and emotional needs.

Turner and colleagues' (2018) autoethnographic account of microaggressions highlight additional burdens transgender and queer students face in academia. First, "queer isolation" was characterized as a deficit in community and mentorship that requires going beyond immediate professional circles to form supportive and collegial relationships. A second theme, "throwing shade," was described by the authors as ways colleagues devalued or discriminated against queer research projects (Turner et al., 2018). The authors described examples of microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidations that added to the burden of queer scholars (Sue, 2010; Turner et al., 2018). That burden included a constant need to come out and/or go back into the closet, filter language and behavior to align with heteronormative "respectability," and continue working despite ongoing homophobia from students, staff, and faculty (Turner et al., 2018). Schools of social work have a responsibility to mitigate this burden through use of institutional action, resources, and support for community building.

Institutional and Faculty Support for TGNB Students

Graduate students should have support networks and opportunities to build professional relationships that extend beyond the classroom (Goldberg et al., 2019a). Faculty-student or mentor-mentee relationships often serve as the conduit for institutional support,

affecting student perceptions of well-being and academic success (Tompkins et al., 2016). However, TGNB graduate students are often left without mentorship or guidance (Fletcher et al., 2015), as their opportunities for institutional support may be limited and alienating (Goldberg et al., 2019a, 2019b).

In a study examining the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming students (TGNC) (n=91) in higher education, Goldberg and colleagues (2019a) focused on perceptions of trans-affirming or negative reactions among other students, faculty, and mentors. They explored how graduate students navigated and accommodated the cisnormativity of the institutions in which they matriculated. Findings indicated that most students' (over 60%) presentation of their gender and appearance was largely influenced by perceptions of safety. Students also reported that faculty and mentors perpetuated ignorance through repeated use of incorrect names and pronouns. The authors wrote, "Rather than continually engaging in efforts to educate, inform, and 'queer,' students conserved their emotional energy in order to survive graduate school" (p. 48). A later study (Goldberg et al., 2021) examined the experiences of 30 trans graduate students with respect to future planning and career development. They found that trans students experience a myriad of stressors including cis-centric barriers at institutional and interpersonal levels. Stressors may have to do with academic progress, identity, career-development, or institutional support. Research participants indicated that the transition from graduate school to the job market is a process that fundamentally lacks the support of competent institutional agents. Ultimately, they noted that these challenges have the potential to hinder and delay career development. Over the past decade, evidence remains persistent: schools of social work in institutions of higher learning continue to perpetuate challenges for TGNB students (see Austin, et al., 2019; Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2011).

What Role Should Schools of Social Work Play?

Over a decade ago, Fredriksen-Goldsen and colleagues (2011) demonstrated that schools of social work lack support for TGNB students and often evidenced transphobic attitudes among educators. A more recent study by Austin et al. (2019) indicated that schools of

social work may actually perpetuate mistreatment and stigma of trans students, writing:

the educational experiences of TGNC students were negatively impacted by the absence of social work environments that were visibly and unequivocally affirmative of TGNC individuals... unwelcoming and potentially hostile social work educational climates have serious implications for TGNC student's well-being. (p. 917)

In response to these findings, Goldberg et al. (2019b) identified several recommendations related to faculty professional development and cultivating networks of trans people on and off campus. In their 2021 work, Goldberg et al. documented evidence-based guidelines for supporting trans graduate students. These included: cultivating knowledge and flexibility; not reinforcing the gender binary; helping students balance safety and authenticity; and facilitating connection to professional supports. In addition, Austin and colleague's prior work (2019) noted the importance of dismantling structural oppression (e.g., related to policy, physical space of institutions); challenging cisgender bias through professional development and modeling unbiased and gender inclusive language; centering trans student experiences, as they are often excluded from graduate school experiences; and extending affirmative practice to the field through education. Given this body of work and recommendations, we note ample opportunities for growth in institutions of higher learning.

In collaboration as faculty and doctoral students, we examine our own institutional status, explore the unique ways in which our institution has evolved, for better or worse, and how we exist within these institutions. While our work may apply to all levels of social work education, we seek to address gaps in the literature specific to the needs and experiences of TGNB doctoral students. We include our positionality statements to honor the reflexivity that was inherent to this process, and to situate our identities and experiences in the current context of social work education within a trans-antagonistic sociopolitical environment. We encourage readers to consider their positionality and how they may respond to our words, implement our recommendations, or contribute their own,

and help move us from “critical conversations” to critical action in support of TGNB social work students and scholars.

Methods

Author Positionality

Isaac M. Akapnitis (“IA”). I am a white, queer, trans, neurodivergent social work doctoral student. While I have experienced challenges within social work education, there is a contrast between those I encountered as a visibly queer/trans MSSW student early in my transition and those I encounter now as a doctoral student. I attribute some of this variance to being more settled in my body and identity, but view it largely as a result of my white and often cis/heterosexual-presumed privilege. As I strive to remain in service to TGNB communities through social work research and advocacy, and continue in my development as a trans scholar, I find myself ever more fearful about the implications of the sharp rise in anti-trans legislation and demoralized by the trans erasure and silence of our academic institutions about ongoing violence perpetuated against our communities. Engaging in this process with trusted colleagues fostered space for vulnerability and reflection and generated renewed energy as we call on social work to do and be better for TGNB students and scholars.

G. Trey Jenkins (“TJ”). I am a Black, mixed race, and queer scholar who studies Black trans and queer mental health. During the process of thinking and writing about this paper, I was struck by the strong feelings I had around the desire for emotional support and community and the resentment I held about not being able to receive the level of support I needed early in my doctoral education. I also felt resentful of the lack of visible and vocal support of trans and queer scholars among schools of social work. I perceived the silence as failing the trans people in their institutions. When the news broke about how the Texas Attorney General and Governor colluded to create and enforce a mandate that child protective service providers investigate trans youth and their families citing child abuse, I was disgusted. I waited eagerly for schools of social work to openly reject the decision. Unfortunately, the response was slow and largely silent. As a result, Isaac and I co-authored an open

letter that was sent to our institution through an internal newsletter and while I welcomed the opportunity, I was frustrated that as students, we had the added burden of speaking out. These feelings came out in various ways during our author discussions, which for me, continues to be an important area of reflexivity and thought.

Natasha "Tasha" S. Mendoza ("TM"). I am a mid-career associate professor whose research is firmly rooted in my personal experience as a cisgender, Latina, lesbian. Over the past ten years as a faculty member, I have explored and elucidated the ways in which identity (i.e., cultural, gender, sexual) and wellness may be assets in behavioral health. I firmly believe that behavior change is a function of interpersonal relationships, culture and systems, and power and oppression. I am proud to serve as doctoral advisor and mentor to Isaac and Trey. Motivation for writing this paper is solidly couched in a need to understand student standpoints and learn how to create opportunities for institutional growth.

Collaborative and Critical Autoethnography

Autoethnographic research has the potential to elevate community-embedded knowledge, provide counter narratives to dominant cultural stories, and to challenge positivist methods as the only legitimate means of knowledge production (Ellis et al., 2011). As such, we utilized collaborative and critical autoethnographic methods to guide our study. Rather than extracting information from a community outside of ourselves, these approaches allowed each author to become both researcher and research participant, and co-construct knowledge through dialogic exchange (Chang et al., 2013; Ellis et al., 2011; Holman Jones, 2016; Lapadat, 2017). Reaching across lines of identity, power, marginalization, and academic hierarchies, we grounded our study in our shared and divergent experiences within social work education with respect to our unique social locations. More specifically, we used interactive interviewing in an effort to provide mutual support, share the burden of the emotional labor of engaging in this work, and create equitable opportunities for all authors to both lead and engage in discussion (Ellis et al., 2011).

We applied a critical autoethnographic lens which calls for the continued interrogation of dominant cultural narratives that shape perceptions towards marginalized communities, and mobilization

against systems of oppression (Boylorn & Orbe, 2020). Holman Jones, a queer, feminist, critical autoethnographer, stresses the importance of ongoing reflexivity in relation to our positionality, praxis, and assumptions embedded in our theories. As Jones states, "... theory is not a body of knowledge—a given, static and autonomous set of ideas, objects, or practices. Instead, theorizing is an ongoing... process that links the concrete and abstract..." (2016, p. 229). The writing of this paper has become part of this reflective practice.

Data Gathering and Analysis

While situating our own work within a framework of trans, queer, and intersecting identities, we credit the model for our data gathering process to Jackson et al. (2022) who developed a Black Feminist Polyethnography to interrogate gendered anti-Blackness in schools of social work. In addition to interactive interviewing, we engaged in a series of pre-discussion brainstorming meetings, a reflexive writing session, and iterative rounds of individual and group coding and analysis.

Trey recommended a collaboration on this paper to build upon previous work together and address these topics within social work more broadly. After reviewing the National Town Hall on Anti-Trans Policies & Social Work Education (Center for LGBTQ+ Research & Advocacy and the University of Kansas School of Social Welfare, 2022) and several discussions together, we identified a list of potential topics for autoethnographic exploration. We then created a list of interview questions with the goal of eliciting perspectives from each author. We held two recorded discussions over Zoom, each lasting between one to two hours, and later reviewed the transcripts to identify any areas needing further clarification or attention from our initial interview guide. We individually and collectively addressed these gaps through reflexive writing in a shared document. After all data was collected, we engaged in thematic analysis, ongoing shared memoing, and member-checking to identify codes and themes within the data.

Results

When we first conceptualized this paper, the intended focal point was the impact of the silence of our social work institutions in response to anti-transgender legislation. However, it became clear that the public policy response was just one manifestation of a lack of support for TGNB social work scholars. Expanding beyond policy, we uncovered the ways in which we have felt underrepresented, overburdened, and silenced within schools of social work. As such, we found ourselves returning to three primary themes: gender and race “noise”; invisibility and abandonment; and queer scavenging.

“All of the Noise”

Isaac and Trey, who are currently doctoral students, noted a pervasive “noise” related to gender and race. Gender and race noise builds on “gender dysphoria noise” (Olson-Kennedy, 2019), or a TGNB person’s persistent awareness of their gender. The noise is particularly loud if they are experiencing duress about the misalignment between their sex assigned at birth and embodied gender. For doctoral students, the noise becomes part of our ecology and results in a constant weight or burden to manage information related to identity and self-protection. Trey shared how racial noise compounds gender noise through microaggressions and existential questions of authentically navigating academia as a Black, trans academic.

TJ: Race noise...is like trying to take a test while mosquitoes, flies, and bees are circling around you...and the noise is mildly annoying. Other times it’s mosquitoes, where the bites leave a lasting impression...[or] the sting is so strong I struggle to ease the pain. It is ever present, all around you, and difficult to identify or articulate. So then I feel insane, like it didn’t happen. Gender noise is more internal, existential, even though it can be external, like a microaggression. [S]ome race noise is internal and existential... Some questions that I grapple with are what is my identity as a Black academic? How much do I incorporate “professional” expectations? And if I change these things about myself, to what

degree am I being less authentic to my own sense of self and self-worth? Couple that with gendered expectations and I am in a constant state of “who am I?”

Decision-making and constant monitoring becomes part of the burden students carry as they decide whether to come out to peers, colleagues, or prospective employers while remaining authentically engaged with their research and communities. As Isaac relayed,

IA: When do I start saying “we,” “I,” or “they”?...Do I need to come out to establish that I have this connection to the community to be taken seriously [as a researcher]?...Is it safe to disclose [my identity]?...I make a decision in that moment, but there’s no going back in the closet for me.

Finally, as a queer, cisgender faculty member, Tasha related to gender noise through the pervasive heteronormativity present in academic spaces. This was instructive for the doctoral students in that some experiences don’t end with graduation, but merely take a different shape.

TM: I come out all the time. I don’t have to...that’s privilege right?...I can choose not to if it feels unsafe. But typically I do and will come out all the time...My experience as a queer cisgender woman is not parallel with your experience as transgender men... But I think what I experience is more awkwardness, like going to faculty parties... because everybody brings their partner and it’s such a straight space...it just drips over everything, over every conversation, and it’s so heteronormative you know...and then you’re like...everything I understand about my world and my partner is just a little bit off...like being from a different planet.

Gender and race noise can lead to the recognition and resentment that academic spaces were not designed with trans, queer, and racialized scholars in mind. There is little guidance in understanding the consequences of engaging authentically or what we stand to lose when we cut parts of ourselves off to fit into the academy.

"The Silence Makes Me Feel Invisible and Abandoned."

Another prevailing theme was the burden of silence and silencing within schools of social work. Our own institution measures itself as a function of its inclusivity, and schools of social work center themselves in the NASW Code of Ethics. And yet, due in large part to hidden university political agendas and relationships, a majority of our social work institutions have failed to meaningfully respond to anti-trans legislation targeting trans youth around the country.

TM: Even if there's not much you can do, but make the statement...it does speak publicly and internally about...our values and ethics as a discipline...We still believe it together because we're a community of social workers in this system...But at the same time, I'm really aware that the reason that there's not a lot of [politically charged] statements that go out of social work...is because [the messages] get silenced at the various levels of administration.

Trey responded to this revelation by pointing to the critical need to name the insidious forms of oppression in schools of social work that uphold the status quo:

TJ: This is the first time we're hearing about some of those things that are operating at the higher levels [of university administration]...the only way that we are going to break down white supremacy, the only way we're going to break down the transphobia...is by being transparent about what is holding it back...And the more the school...becomes complicit by keeping that at the top...rather than being transparent about it, nothing changes... No one's taking the risk of pulling down the shades.

This contradiction between stated values and demonstrated priorities becomes something of a moral injury. TGNB students must either remain silent or risk the consequences of speaking out. Isaac reflected on the utility of student-led open letters or calls to action in the absence of formal statements from schools of social work. Even if the administration disseminates the information, does this

allow universities or social work programs to maintain a “neutral” stance on these issues? These questions generate additional feelings of abandonment and frustration:

TJ: [O]ne of the things that’s so frustrating about it is...we’re just talking out of both sides of our mouth in the program. That becomes the identity. It’s like saying that we’re all about these things, and that we’re supporting people, but our experience as trans students...is the opposite...[It] adds to that burden of like okay well...we’re going to say something on top of all the other things we got to do...You feel like the investment you make into the school...is not reciprocated.

It is difficult to ignore institutional silence when the underlying message is that tangible, visible support for TGNB communities is not worth the risk of political upset. This is a painful reality for TGNB students in social work like Trey to consider: “The silence makes me feel invisible and abandoned in a space where I should not be. If I was accepted as a doc student then all parts of me should be supported.”

“Queer Scavenging”

The solution to the existential noise and institutional silence is in community making, and a community that we must build for ourselves. Queer scholars describe scavenging as a strategy used to piece together the often hidden stories of queer and trans people (Halberstam, 1999; Murphy & Lugg 2016; Waite, 2015). We borrow this term to articulate that in order to stay in the academy, we have to “scavenge” for our own resources, information, and community. As Trey shared:

TJ: Early on (during classes), I needed room to talk about what it meant for me to do research with trans people. I needed more time to incorporate positionality and reflexivity in my early conceptualizations...At this stage, what I need is continued space to talk about my role in this work, unique challenges I might face, and what gender/race noise I need to address at the next stages of the PhD process.

The need for this scavenging also stems from a deep connection to the communities and issues in which our research is centered. TGNB scholars are acutely aware of harm enacted on TGNB and other marginalized communities in the name of research. As illuminated through the following exchange, students need to engage with mentors and colleagues who understand these ethical considerations and can provide guidance to avoid perpetuating further harm.

TM: I have yet to work with a doctoral student who's not studying something that's intimately related to who they are, as a person... [D]octoral programs can send students into an existential crisis... because [in our work] you—we—we all study who we are.

TJ: I remember the very first crisis I was having in the work was, am I gonna say something in a paper that I could eventually publish that would be so damaging—and not to myself—but like could I damage my community? I was so stressed about that.

As we discussed scavenging to identify resources and connections, Tasha posed the following question: “Have you been able to build community [as doctoral students]?” She was met with a mixed response as each student reflected on areas wherein they have forged relationships to support their personal and academic needs thus far, and where gaps remain:

TJ: I would say yes and no to that question. Yes, I have a community of our cohort...so that feels like a very strong community for me in terms of the doctoral program. But there's still a missing piece...I did have to go elsewhere to bring in other queer Black scholars into my life. I wish that...there was something more established within the school that was trans specific.

IA: I'm still learning how to step into spaces of vulnerability to build community...My next building community [effort]...is around... these mental health pieces that I'm figuring out about myself... what it means to have lived experience as a doc student and how that plays into...studying trans mental health and...mak[ing] sure I'm building community to debrief and take a break.

This limited support for TGNB students appears to be a symptom of missing infrastructure at the institutional level for both students and faculty. Trans and queer faculty and mentors scavenge for resources for themselves and their students, leaving faculty to balance mentoring others and attending to their own career aspirations. Tasha shared an example when she encountered this conflict after being asked to advise a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) student group:

TM: In a way it's sort of a double-edged sword because I absolutely want to be of support to queer students because I feel as if there's ways that I can relate to the queer student story...And at that point [pre-tenure] I couldn't do it...It just felt like I was a failure, I was failing students, I was failing myself because I should always be able to make room.

As evidenced by our experiences with gender and race noise, invisibility and abandonment, and the need to scavenge for resources and community, TGNB graduate students and their mentors carry a significant burden as they engage in social work graduate education. This drains intellectual and emotional labor, time, and resources away from our research endeavors, academic obligations, and ability to take care of ourselves and engage with our communities. Social work must be willing to address these challenges to recruit, retain, and uplift TGNB students and scholars.

Discussion

Our overarching themes: noise, silence, and scavenging, are related to the ecological environment of the school in which students matriculate and the consequences of having evolved in this context (i.e., scavenging). We illustrated an environment in which constant internal awareness of race, gender and sexual orientation is a compulsory and regular part of each day. Adding to this burden is the silence perpetuated by school systems that require students and faculty to step into service roles without a clear scaffolding for which to build efforts that incite change. Without a clear framework, students and faculty may be left to scavenge for resources,

information, and means to build community. In sum, our findings point to a needed blueprint for schools to offer to TGNB and queer students and faculty who seek support and are forced to hear all of the noise associated with simply existing within the system.

Aligned with the work of Olson-Kennedy (2019) (i.e., gender dysphoria noise), our description of “noise” includes issues relating to asserting identity or social anxiety navigating professional scenarios. We also suggested that race noise increases the cacophony and thus perceived need to respond to address internal struggles like either shutting down or finding ways to address the noise head-on through filtering, strategizing or carefully calculating what is said in educational and professional settings. For queer graduate students and faculty, including those who are gender expansive, and especially people of color, the constant need to formulate response or quiet “the noise” substantially increases the mental workload compared to students who are not similarly marginalized. An awareness of this burden is a necessary consideration for school faculty and leaders seeking to offer support and help create scaffolding on which to build sustainable supportive structures.

Adding to the ecological considerations for faculty and administrations, the structure and support of TGNB students must be formed with the realization that response to the needs of TGNB students and the faculty seeking to support them has been largely missing. We point out that, within our own institution, support (pragmatic or existential) is not clearly demarcated for students, faculty or staff (i.e, silent). Silence, we noted, also takes the shape of schools failing to make public statements decrying public policy that could harm trans students, which in our view, is a failing of our discipline’s ethical and value-based standards. Clearly, perceived silence and abandonment on part of the institution could exacerbate feelings of “queer isolation” noted by Turner and colleagues (2018). In sum, limited institutional support could further alienate trans students (e.g., Goldberg et al., 2019a, 2019b).

Alienation and isolation may create a scenario in which students are forced to “scavenge” for their own resources in order to succeed in graduate school and beyond. Finding mentors, engaging with relevant research, and preparing for the market are tasks

with which graduate students typically have support. However, for trans students, seeking queer mentors, especially those engaged in queer research (if related to student substantive focus), and understanding important issues related to the job market are efforts made substantially harder when there are no obvious school supports or professional communities. Ultimately, students must find one another and seek out faculty at other institutions who can bridge gaps in career development. Institutions that aid students in finding and cultivating networks, like Goldberg and colleagues suggested (2019b, 2021), can ultimately support trans and queer graduate student career development.

Fundamentally, our recommendations are related to institutional intention to remove burden from students, assisting with logistics associated with building sustainable networks, and publicly supporting them. Action in these three domains is foundational to our social work values and ethics. To remove burden and quiet “the noise” schools and administrators can take steps to create a curriculum that is inclusive of gender and sexuality continua along with assurance that content is otherwise culturally attuned. Specifically, TGNB content must be woven across the curriculum, not in a single-focused class. Doing so leads to communities and classrooms less likely to harm and more likely to thrive. In addition, school administrators can and should assist with logistics associated with knowledgeable and sustainable networks which may mean adding resources for staff and faculty to support students so that these efforts are not dependent on burdened students alone to build and sustain. We also call on all schools of social work to speak out publicly when community members are oppressed. Public statements made on behalf of students and the community in which schools exist demonstrates that schools are safe havens, where students and community members feel supported.

Calling attention to our national organizations, our social work research, educational, accrediting, licensing, practice-oriented and membership bodies must also leverage their resources, relationships, and power to demonstrate leadership in their support of TGNB students, faculty, and community members. As leaders in our field, they must be willing to reiterate social work values and ethics and utilize social work research to speak out against harmful

legislation and political action that is antithetical to our profession. Additionally, these national organizations can provide instrumental support to ensure the successful matriculation of TGNB students and recruitment and retention of the faculty who support them. Such support should include mentoring, developing fellowships specific for TGNB students and those who conduct research in TGNB communities, creating and bolstering student-led learning communities, and facilitating networking opportunities between TGNB students and faculty for mentoring, research, and community building. Support for early career queer and TGNB faculty who engage in TGNB research with financial resources, professional development, and mentorship is critical to develop their capacity to conduct TGNB research. This will provide TGNB students who want to conduct trans-centered research access to relevant data and projects that align with their interests. Importantly, when hosting academic conferences and membership meetings, which are considered essential activities for emerging scholars, social work organizations should take critical issues such as access, safety, affordability, and environment into account, for both the conference venue and the geographic location in which the venue is located. This includes informing students of their rights and protections for conference attendance, creating clear and transparent processes for reporting and responding to any violations, and demonstrating allyship through affirming practices such as adding gender pronouns to conference registration and badges, and ensuring access to gender neutral restroom facilities at the conference venue.

Conclusion

Schools of social work and the administrations that articulate their infrastructure have a responsibility to serve as safe havens for students to thrive. Supportive systems are critical to the matriculation of graduate students, especially students from historically marginalized groups. Trans students can and will learn and achieve in environments in which the burden of noise is quieted by leadership and is heard publicly, decrying oppression and injustice. Ultimately, students will trust systems in which there is transparent adherence to our Social Work Code of Ethics. When our discipline's

values are publicly operationalized, seen, and heard by our institutional leaders, graduate students are energized to grow into their expertise as social work scholars. Trans students who trust and feel supported in schools of social work may be better equipped to navigate daily injustices if there is a stable and supportive professional foundation on which they can build their careers.

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