



Supporting Transgender Students in Higher Education in the UK

Presentation for LGBT History Month, University of Kent

February 2022



Terminology

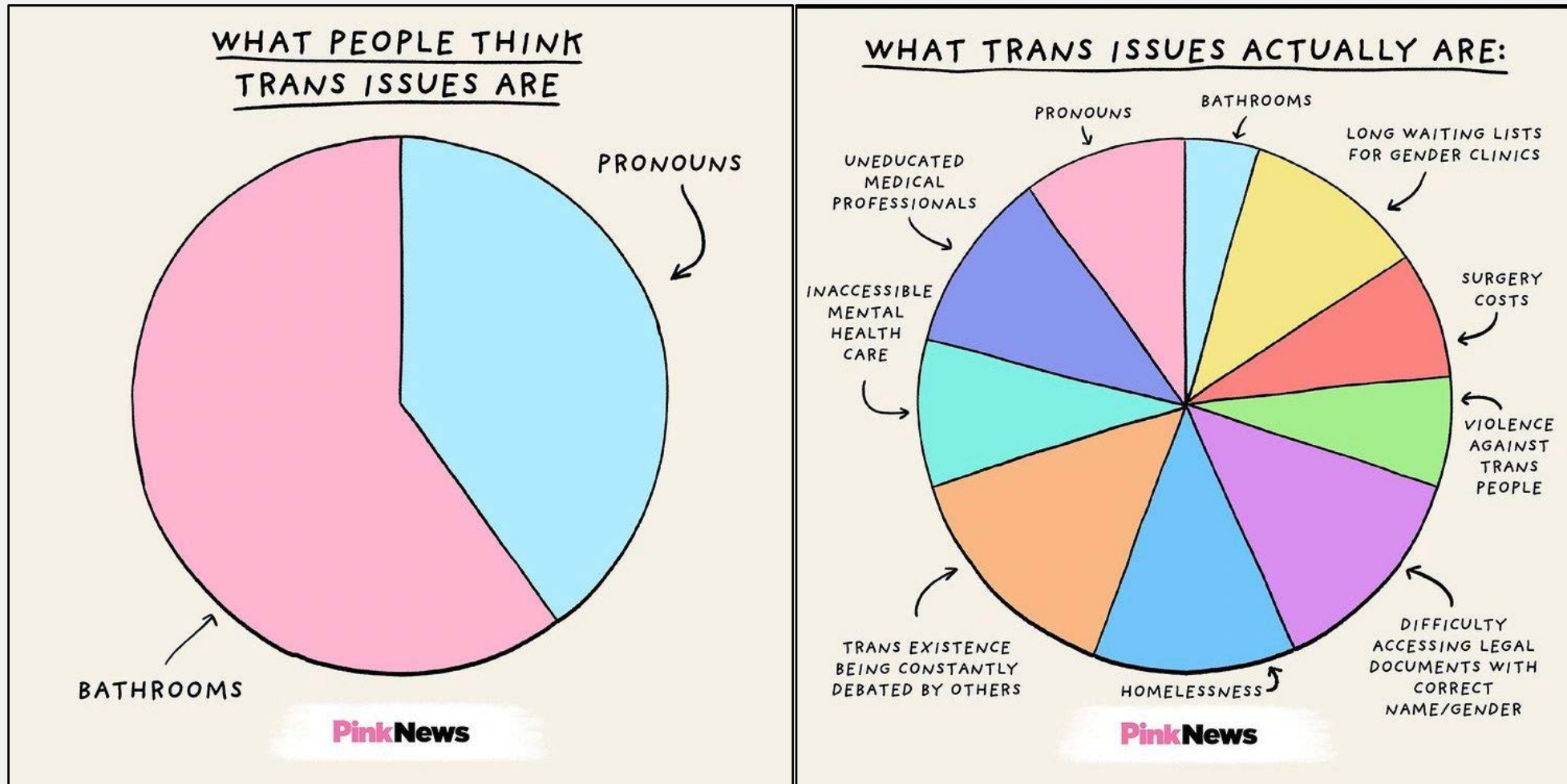
- In this presentation, transgender is used as an umbrella term for those whose gender identity and/or gender expression does not match the sex they were assigned at birth, or who do not conform to conventional gender binaries of man/woman. I use the term 'trans' and 'transgender' as inclusive terms to reflect the full spectrum of identities within this, including but not exclusive to transgender, transsexual, genderqueer, gender fluid, non-binary and gender non-conforming.
- Cisgender - someone who exclusively identifies as the sex they were assigned at birth.
- Cisnormativity - how society is orientated around the assumption that a person's gender matches the biological sex they were assigned at birth.



Background

- UK Gender Identity Clinic (London) – “an unprecedented rise in referrals in the last year... outstripping the number of available first appointments by a factor of 2 to 1.” (Gender Identity Clinic, 2018).
- 435 referrals made to the London GIC in December 2021 alone.
- 49-month wait for first appointments.
- December 2021: 10,648 people on the waiting list with first appointment referrals being made to those referred in November 2017 (Gender Identity Clinic, 2022)

There is more to trans issues than pronouns and toilets





Study

- Internet survey:
 - 164 participants
 - 61 HEIs
 - 65 identified as male
 - 30 identified as female
 - 61 identified as non-binary
 - 8 'other'
- One-to-one interviews (Skype):
 - 7 participants
 - 7 HEIs
- Documentary analysis:
 - 8 HEIs



Main themes

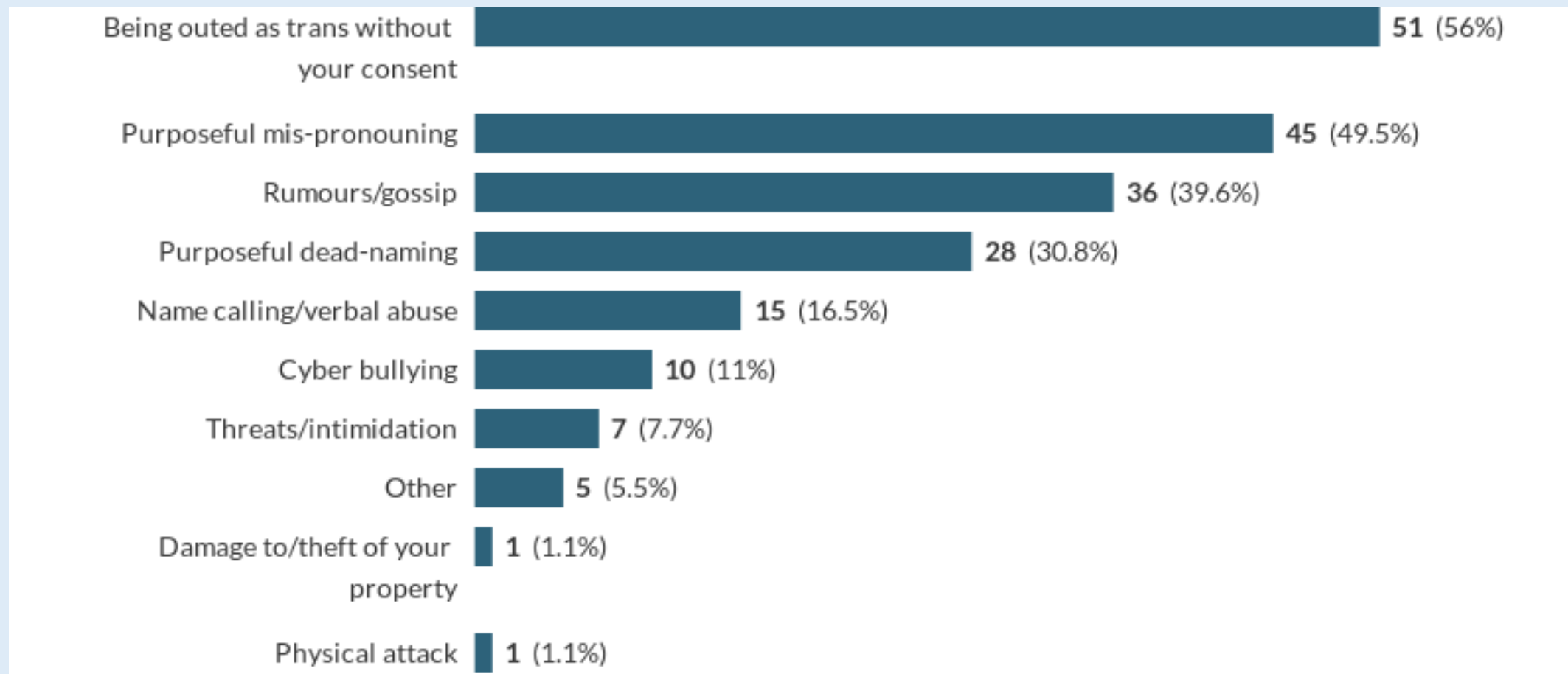
- Findings from the literature review and from my study identified four main themes:
 - Institutional facilities and administration
 - Harassment, bullying and transphobia
 - Inclusion/exclusion
 - Representation in the curriculum.



Institutional facilities and administration

- *“One of the biggest problems for me in my experience was that I was constantly reminded of the name I didn't choose. I don't even care all that much about the pronoun stuff, to be honest, I care way more about the name because if they call me by my old name, I just feel 21 years of frustration and anxiety building up in me... That's just all of these constant reminders are just really unpleasant and hurtful .”*
- *“The gender-neutral toilets are also the disabled toilets, which is interesting because I'm able-bodied and so I don't always feel comfortable using toilets that are specifically for disabled people.”*
- *“I had to either go to the women's restroom and feel wrong, or go to the men's restroom and feel even more wrong because, you know, I can't pee standing... It really comes down to these very detailed personal experiences.”*

Harassment, bullying and transphobia



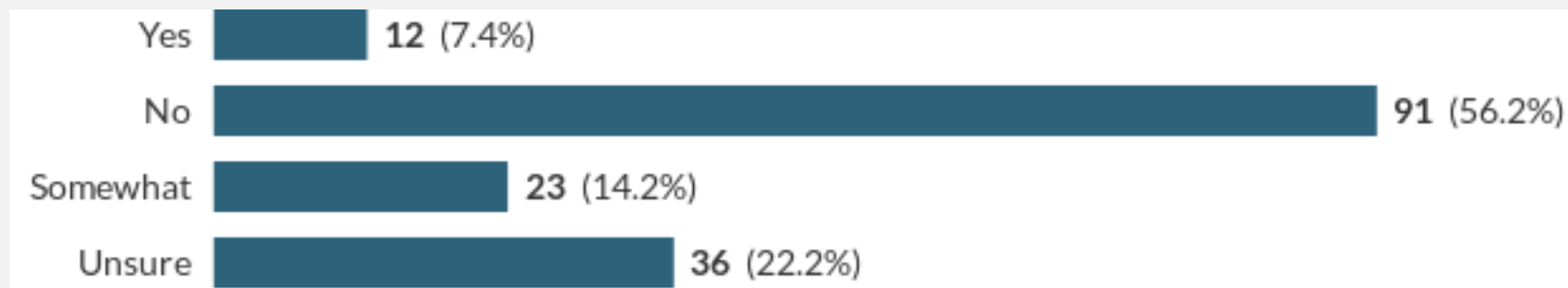


Inclusion/exclusion

- Student unions/LGBT+ societies
- Counselling
 - *“[The] counsellor just blamed everything on me being gay, or just blamed everything on me being trans... Clearly all your trauma, trauma comes from this... I go to a counsellor, but I can tell you that being trans is like, the least of my problems.”*
 - *“I've also had the situation where they found out I'm trans, and then they wanted me to teach them about the whole process of transitioning... [so they] can then go away and help other trans students... It has, it has stopped quite a few students from like wanting to access their services.”*
 - *“...without fully understanding their experiences, college counselling centre clinicians may struggle with how to best support students who identify outside a gender binary” (Swanbrow Becker, 2019 – BACP website)*

Representation in the curriculum

- Do you feel represented in the university curriculum?



- *Representation in professional health sciences curricula:*
 - *“It needs to be demystified and debunked. And I think the heat needs to be taken out of it... It’s about having a vocabulary for it, about feeling okay not knowing and feeling okay to be able to sort of say ‘... I’m not that familiar with working with trans people, can you help me out here? What pronouns do you like to use? How do you like to refer to things?’... It’s not one size fits all. Language that I might feel comfortable with might not be suitable for somebody else.”*



Acknowledging and questioning institutional cisnormativity

- “Institutional cisheteronormativity”, where university education is orientated around a presumption of cisgender, heterosexual identities and is therefore more exclusionary for trans students Marzetti (2018).
- HEIs need to acknowledge the privilege of a majority cisgender environment with, in most cases, totally cisgender decision and policy makers at the higher echelons of leadership and avoid approaches to equality and diversity in which “certain identities trump others in terms of what counts as diversity” (Calafell, 2020).
- Invalidation and exclusion for trans students and the creation of an atmosphere of inequality.



Creating an inclusive curriculum

- Resistance to anti-oppressive change.
- Working collaboratively with trans students around inclusive teaching.
- Inclusive language.
- “What is oppressive is having to experience, again and again, the privileging of only certain ways of identifying, thinking, or relating to others” (Kumashiro, 2002).
- The inclusive curriculum needs to address not only a lack of knowledge, but a resistance to knowledge, and in particular a resistance to any knowledge that disrupts what the students already know.



Professional health care sciences curricula

- Students are need to be provided with the ‘tools’ to help them work with and respect trans people.
- Improving the curriculum in these areas will help to reduce the variation that exists in health and mental health care and improve the experiences of trans people.
- It is important that professional health sciences students learn about how to address and talk to trans people, the value of affirming language, and how to recognise and address prejudice and bias.



Mental health difficulties and gender dysphoria

- Gender dysphoria is no longer classed as a mental health disorder.
- It can be confusing, distressing, frightening.
- Trans people are often at higher risk of mental health difficulties due to a number of factors, including having experienced social exclusion, discrimination and violence, or having kept their identity hidden.
- Waiting times for GIC support and lack of services .
 - GICs and wait times in England:
 - Northampton (32 months), Exeter (65 months), London (49 months), Leeds (43 months), Newcastle (49 months), Nottingham (35 months), Sheffield (44 months) (Gender Construction Kit, 2022)



Supporting trans students' mental health needs

- Entrenched cisnormativity can make the campus climate “hostile” and exclusive as the needs of trans students are not being met (Swanbrow Becker *et al.*, 2017).
- Trans students are at a higher risk of mental health difficulties.
- BACP: Despite the higher rate of mental health concerns among trans students, there is a lack of understanding and experience in supporting this student group (Swanbrow Becker, 2019).
- Counselling and mental health providers must have an understanding of the difficulties they may be experiencing.

What can I do?

- [Rainbow lanyards](#)
- [Put your pronouns in your email signature](#)
- [Inclusive language](#)



| Advice | Don't Use | Instead |
|---|---|---|
| Use gender neutral terms rather than those that make sex distinction | Man, Mankind Workmanship Man the desk/phones Man-made | Humans, Humankind Quality of work/skills Attend the phones Artificial, manufactured, synthetic |
| Use gender neutral pronouns and expressions. | Anyone who wants his work evaluated Welcome ladies and gentlemen | Anyone who wants their work evaluated Welcome to friends and colleagues Welcome to everyone |
| Use person-centred language. | The transgender | Trans people |
| Respect the preference of those people who want to be referred to by gender neutral pronouns. | She, her, hers and he, him, his | They, them, theirs (e.g. Xena ate their food because they were hungry.) It is correct to use in the singular. |



What about Kent?

- [Kent's Trans Student Policy and Support Procedures](#)
 - Guidance about transitioning (Appendix 1a, 1b)
 - General advice and guidance (Appendix 2)
 - Terminology guide (Appendix 3)
 - Support guidance (Appendix 4)
 - Action plan for supporting a student during transition (Appendix 5)
- [Gender reassignment toolkits and resources](#)
- [Support for trans students](#) – TG Pals
- [Report + Support](#) – reporting incidents such as sexual assault, harassment, relationship abuse or hate crime
- [Change of personal details](#) – How students can amend their title (including to Mx), amend their gender identity marker (male, female, other, prefer not to say), change their preferred name, or advise a legal name change.
- [Gender-neutral toilets](#)



Staff and student training

- Transgender Awareness staff training
 - This module provides information, guidance and resources relating to gender and transgender identity.
- LGBTQI Awareness staff training
 - This module provides information, guidance and resources relating to LGBTQI awareness.
- Links to both modules are on the [EDI Training page](#)
- [Expect Respect module for students](#)
- [Student Equality, Diversity & Inclusivity pages](#)
- [University of Kent guidance on pronouns](#)



The research is done, so what now?

- Presentation to Executive Group at Kent
- Presentation to KMMS students and Social Work students?
- Presentation to Student Support & Wellbeing staff.
- Webinars to HEIs across the UK
- Presentation to Student Finance England/Wales/Northern Ireland and Student Awards Agency in Scotland?
- Publication of research



Useful links

- [Young Minds](#) Gender and mental health.
- [16point6](#) LGBTQ inclusive healthcare.
- [TransActual](#) Information about the trans community, and resources for trans healthcare.
- [Mermaids](#) Support for trans, non-binary and gender diverse students aged 18-25.
- [Gendered Intelligence](#) Trans support, and inclusivity training, including information for therapists and counsellors.
- [Stonewall](#) LGBT+ inclusion.
- [Mind Out](#) LGBTQ mental health service.

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