PRONOUNS, PRESCRIPTIVISM, AND PREJUDICE: ATTITUDES TOWARD THE SINGULAR 'THEY', PRESCRIPTIVE GRAMMAR, AND NONBINARY TRANSGENDER PEOPLE

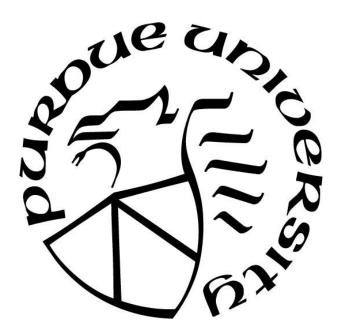by

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This thesis is dedicated to Leelah Alcorn, to the 40% of nonbinary people who attempt suicide, to the nigh countless more who consider it, to the trans people who kill themselves in the closet or out, and to the thousands of transgender people who have been murdered just in the last decade. May their deaths not be in vain.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to extend my impossible-to-understate gratitude to my thesis committee – to Dr. Shannon Bischoff for always finding ways to get stuff done, for encouraging me to pursue this project, and for providing me with the tools I needed to do it – to Dr. Sarah Sandman for pushing me to learn new ways of writing, for combing through a zillion drafts, and for putting up with all of my crazy – to Dr. Kate White for her constant support and encouragement, for pushing me through to get my drafts in, and for reading my work repeatedly – and to Dr. Jay Jackson for being an incredibly kind and wonderful human, for teaching me about and helping me with statistics, and for always being there at the exact right time.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

ABSTRACT

Reviewing literature on the histories of and the attitude studies about transgender people, the use of 'they' as a gender-neutral third-person singular pronoun, prescriptive grammar ideology, and aversive prejudice theory provides insight into how these topics are interrelated and relevant to current issues surrounding nonbinary transgender people. This review inspired my research study. My participants (n = 722) completed an online survey in which they reported demographic variables and answered scales that measured 'they' attitudes in generic and queer contexts, attitudes toward trans people, and prescriptive grammar ideology. I found that the majority of participants approved of using the singular 'they'. Regression analyses revealed that in a queer context, negative attitudes toward 'they' were best predicted by trans prejudice, while in a generic context, both valuing prescriptive grammar and anti-trans prejudice similarly predicted 'they' attitudes. This indicates that negative attitudes toward the singular 'they' are not merely an issue of taking a principled stance against "improper grammar". Additionally, both sexual orientation and gender (trans vs. cisgender) moderate the relationship between prescriptive grammar ideology and 'they' attitudes. Age, sexual orientation, and education level also influenced my pattern of results such that older participants, queer people, and more highly educated individuals were more likely to have positive attitudes toward the singular 'they'. These findings have implications for LGBTQ+ individuals' relationships with cisgender and heterosexual people as well as for theories of prejudice, particularly with regard to the increasingly important area of attitudes toward people with diverse gender identities.

WHY THIS? WHY NOW?

"The only way I will rest in peace is if one day transgender people aren't treated the way I was, they're treated like humans, with valid feelings and human rights. Gender needs to be taught in schools, the earlier the better. My death needs to mean something. My death needs to be counted in the number of transgender people who commit suicide this year. I want someone to look at that number and say "that's fucked up" and fix it. Fix Society. Please." – Leelah Alcorn (2014), Suicide Note

On December 28, 2014, Leelah Alcorn, a young transgender woman, walked in front of a truck on a busy interstate in Ohio, taking her own life. In a suicide note posted on Tumblr, she explained the reasons for her suicide, revealing how her parents and classmates refused to accept her, call her by her name, use her pronouns, and allow her to transition. She begged society to see her death and make it, "mean something" (Alcorn, 2014), urging anyone who heard about her to work to improve the lives of other trans people. Her story made international news, bringing attention to the struggles of transgender people, and it sparked new conversations about the importance of supporting trans friends and family members as well as laws banning conversion therapy (Margolin, 2015).

It is heartbreaking to know that Leelah's suicide is just one example of how significant a number of transgender individuals attempt or complete suicide. This suicide epidemic is prevalent not just for binary trans people like Leelah but also in nonbinary transgender people. Approximately 40% of nonbinary transgender people attempt suicide sometime in their life (Toomey et al., 2018; James et al., 2016). That means that 4 out of 10 people who are nonbinary try to take their own lives, compared to the 4 out of 100 of the average United States population who do (James et al., 2016).

One reason for this devastating phenomenon is the near constant misgendering and deadnaming that transgender — especially nonbinary — individuals face. Misgendering is the act of referring to someone as a gender that they are not (e.g., using "he" to refer to a female), and deadnaming is refusing to use a person's chosen name (e.g., calling Skye "John" because that was their name

at birth). These two acts play a disturbing role in the prevalence of trans people's suicidal ideation, as social support has a massive effect on transgender people's wellbeing.

On average, trans people who receive support from their families, schools, and workplaces are much less likely than their peers to experience depression, suicidal ideation, and poor self-esteem (Pollitt et al., 2019; Bauer et al., 2015). Further, transgender children whose parents allow their children to explore gender, support their transition, and use their chosen name and pronouns experience the same rates of depression and only slightly more anxiety than their cisgender counterparts (Olson et al., 2016). Leelah Alcorn's parents' and classmates' refusal to use her name and pronouns specifically exemplify this issue. As we can see, using trans people's names and pronouns is absolutely crucial to the survival and health of transgender individuals.

Considering the current pervasiveness of trans suicide, studies that enable an understanding of trans people's pronouns and what factors influence people's attitudes toward their use are urgent and vitally important because such research will help society learn how to better support transgender individuals and, hopefully, prevent trans people from experiencing the mental health issues that are presently so common for them. Studying trans people's pronouns, attitudes toward trans people, and factors related to those issues is my current undertaking. But first, I will begin with defining gender, what it is to be transgender, and more specifically, what being nonbinary means. Understanding these themes is necessary to enable an exploration of the topics of this thesis.

BEING AND DEFINING TRANS(GENDER)

> "Define yourself in your own terms. In terms of gender, race, anything. We are not what other people say we are. We are who we know ourselves to be, and we are what we love." – Laverne Cox (2014), interview with *Rookie Magazine*

I would argue that in order to further study trans*gender* people, I must first ask: *What is gender?* It is possible that this is a question that many people fail to consider for their entire lives, considering the reportedly low prevalence of transgender people in the United States (high estimates are only near 1% of the population, though this number is likely skewed by the stigma of coming out as transgender [Collin et al., 2016]). Many people also mistakenly consider gender to be the same thing as sex, as evidenced by the necessity for many LGBTQ+ organizations to provide resources about understanding the difference between sex and gender identity (e.g., National Center for Transgender Equality, 2016). People often believe that there are only two sexes/genders: male and female. They think that doctors look at a child's genitals when they are born, say, "It's a boy!" or "It's a girl!" and that this declaration is a truth for the rest of their life.

However, we know that sex and gender are likely two very separate realities: the first being biological, related to morphology and chromosomes, and the second being some complex, other construct, possibly psychological, performative, expressive, or some combination of those things (Wu, 2016). Scientific studies have demonstrated that sex and gender both have categories other than 'male' and 'female' (e.g., Ainsworth, 2015; Joel et al., 2015); having a sex other than male or female is often referred to as being 'intersex', and having a gender other than male or female is frequently called being 'nonbinary'.[1] Additionally, it is increasingly common for people to identify with a gender — sometimes even a nonbinary gender — other than what they were assigned at birth, as can be seen by the fact that the percentage of teenagers who identify as

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[1] Unfortunately, the scope of this thesis does not allow for an in-depth analysis of intersex individuals, but it is necessary to at least mention them here briefly. Intersex people are individuals born with ambiguous genitalia and/or chromosomes other than XX or XY. These children are nearly always given surgery to 'correct' their genital formation -- surgeries that many intersex individuals later describe as non-consensual genital mutilation. In the United States, families are not allowed to officially designate their babies as intersex at birth, and in the majority of the world, there is no legal recognition of intersex individuals. Being intersex is actually fairly common — between 1-2% of the population is intersex (InterACT, n.d.). Some intersex people identify as transgender, but others do not. The topic of intersex people and their interaction with the trans community is a complex, important issue that needs to be researched further.

transgender and/or nonbinary (nearly 3%) is much greater than that of the general population (Rider et al., 2018).

Personally, I am one of those people who has found my gender to be different from the sex I was assigned at birth. I identify as a nonbinary transgender person, and I use the singular 'they' as my pronoun. As 'nonbinary' is an umbrella term under which many other identifications fall, such as genderqueer, genderfluid, agender, bigender, demiboy, demigirl, and so on, it is not uncommon for nonbinary people to have very different perceptions of what gender is. Being nonbinary, I, too, often question what gender even is. Since I know that my own gender is not 'male' or 'female,' I find myself thinking that I should have some ready, concise, definite answer to that question. But I do not.

Questioning what gender is seems deceptively simple, but even after reading hundreds of pages of related sources, I have not found a simple or even solidly agreed-upon answer. In my readings, the phrase "gender is [...]" appeared at least a hundred times (e.g., Butler, 1999), but still, the answer to the question is ambiguous. Authors sometimes describe gender — especially nonbinary gender — by stating what it is not: it is not just male or female, not necessarily what is assigned at birth, not the same as sex, not predetermined, not simple as it seems, and so on (e.g., Butler, 1999; APA, n.d.).

But what *is* gender? In her 2017 book *Transgender History*, influential trans author Susan Stryker dedicates several pages in her "Contexts, Concepts, and Terms" chapter to attempt to describe gender and define what it is, while most other terms were given a mere paragraph. Stryker (2017) suggests that gender is a construct based on cultural and historical beliefs and that it is an, "organization of bodies into different categories of people" (pp. 14–15). She describes gender as a part of people's identities, and she recognizes that gender is much more complex than many people believe, something which everyone experiences differently.

The prominent gender studies scholar Judith Butler's offered definitions of gender are nebulous and often contradictory, but her key theme is that gender is performative. Rather than something someone *is*, Butler thinks gender is something someone *does* — she believes that gender is not

internally predetermined but instead that it is continually reproduced through a series of performances that somehow add up to an appearance of being (Butler, 1989; 1999).

So then, for the present purposes, here is my definition of gender: Gender, which is distinct from biological sex, can be different from the biological sex one is assigned at birth, and there are more genders than merely the 'male' and 'female' categories in the binary gender system many people believe in. In other words, there are nonbinary genders. As I define gender, I believe I must note that historically, biological sex has been viewed as binary and has been conflated with gender, but newer research provides evidence that sex and gender are more complicated than this (e.g., Ainsworth, 2015). Further, while it is clear that biological sex is something people are born with, I also believe that, as Wu (2016) suggests, gender may at least in part also be predetermined by biological and genetic factors partially unrelated to biological sex. Additionally, to borrow parts of Stryker and Butler's definitions, gender is a construct built by one's culture, but regardless of culture, gender is performed. This definition has subtle differences from the definition of gender provided by the World Health Organization, which represents commonly held beliefs about gender: "Gender refers to the roles, behaviours, activities, attributes and opportunities that any society considers appropriate for girls and boys, and women and men. Gender interacts with, but is different from, the binary categories of biological sex" (WHO, n.d.). Therefore, for the purposes of this work, gender is a performed cultural construct that is distinct from biological sex and that may have partial determinants in biology distinct from those responsible for biological sex. With this multifaceted definition of gender in mind, what I can most confidently say is that what gender *is* is complicated.

Working with this definition of gender, I can ask: what does it mean to be *trans*gender? Simply put, to be transgender (or 'trans' for short) is to identify with a gender different from what was assigned at birth.[2] So, this could be someone assigned male at birth (i.e., generally born with a penis) identifying as female, someone assigned female at birth (i.e., generally born with a vagina) identifying as male, or someone assigned either male or female at birth identifying as a nonbinary gender that is neither male nor female. As such, there are both binary trans people —

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[2] Non-transgender people are referred to as 'cisgender' or 'cis' — this term refers to people who do identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. Essentially, cis is the opposite of trans.

those who identify as the binary genders male or female — and nonbinary trans people — those who identify as a gender that is neither male nor female.[3]

This identification can lead to *transitioning* — making changes in one's life to either complicate or change the gender which one is perceived as. These changes might include social choices like changing pronouns and clothing style, legal choices like changing names and gender markers on legal state identification, and medical choices like doing hormone replacement therapy and having gender confirmation surgery. There is no wrong way to be transgender. For example, one trans woman might go from presenting as male after being assigned male at birth all the way to completely reshaping her life by having a stereotypically female name, growing long hair, having facial feminization surgery and a vaginoplasty, undergoing electrolysis, and wearing feminine clothing; while another trans woman might make none of those changes, only quietly revealing her gender to friends online and making no changes in other areas of life. Both of these women are valid transgender women. This is an example of a binary gender transition.

For gender nonbinary people, transitioning can be complicated. With the pervasive societal perception that there are only two genders — male and female — it is nigh impossible for nonbinary people to be consistently recognized as the gender that they are outside of special trans-friendly circles and among some friends. Faced with that dilemma, some nonbinary people make an effort to look as androgynous as possible, others transition to appear more masculine or feminine, and some make no changes to their appearance at all. Some nonbinary people are satisfied with presenting themselves toward one end or the other of the male-female spectrum, while others aim to exist in the middle of or entirely outside of that spectrum. So, nonbinary transition can involve all or none of the actions that binary transitions often include.

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[3] I would like to recognize the fact that nonbinary people who do not refer to themselves as transgender are valid. While not all nonbinary people identify as transgender, it is generally accepted that 'nonbinary' falls under the transgender umbrella (Scottish Trans Alliance, n.d.). Thus, as I operationalize definitions for the present purposes, I will refer to nonbinary people as transgender. Additionally, later on, I will use the terms 'queer', 'transgender', and 'nonbinary' to refer to the singular 'they' when it references a specific person who uses that as their pronoun. This could be an issue because not everyone who uses 'they' as their pronoun identifies with those terms. Again, though, I believe this choice was necessary for the purposes of analysis and operationalization.

Perhaps, though, one of the most common social transition actions nonbinary people take is to change their pronouns. Many nonbinary individuals choose to use pronouns other than 'she' and 'he' in an effort to reflect the fact that their gender is neither male nor female, and while dozens of somewhat more popular nonbinary pronouns exist (e.g., 'ze', 'fae', 'ey', etc.), and nigh countless less popular ones make their rounds, the most common choice for nonbinary people's pronouns is the singular version of 'they' (Cassian, 2019). Using these pronouns is vitally important to properly gendering nonbinary people and helping them feel included in their communities (Zimman, 2017). The experiences and transitions of nonbinary transgender people vary widely, but overall, they have a common thread: the understanding that gender is complex and that it is more diverse than just 'male' and 'female'.

Essentially, then, gender can be 'male', 'female', or something else entirely (i.e., a nonbinary gender), and it is at least in part a performed cultural construct somewhat impacted by sex assigned at birth. Gender is complicated, partially because it can be different from one's assigned sex. In other words, some people are transgender. Some transgender people fit within the male-female binary, or they can be nonbinary, identifying with a gender toward the center of or outside of the gender binary. With this operational understanding of what gender is and what it means to be transgender and nonbinary, we can examine the history of transgender people and how it sets the stage to begin to understand attitudes toward trans individuals.

THE HALTING BUT HOPEFUL PROGRESS OF WESTERN TRANSGENDER HISTORY

> "Genuine bonds of solidarity can be forged between [trans] people who respect each other's differences and are willing to fight their enemy together. [...]. We can win true liberation. The struggle against intolerable conditions is on the rise around the world. And the militant role of transgendered women, men and youths in today's fight-back movement is already helping to shape the future." – Leslie Feinberg (1992, p. 22), *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come*

Before delving into the details of the history of Western transgender culture and its fight for existence, I would like to recognize that many Native Americans as well as other cultural groups outside of America have never ascribed to standard European gender norms. Some Native American cultures have multiple genders, most famously including two-spirit people, and many Indigenous people groups include people assigned male at birth who live as women and vice versa; further, other cultures have genders that are entirely separate from male and female, like *hijras* in India (Towle & Morgan, 2006). The World Health Organization (n.d.[b]) also addresses these cultural differences in gender:

> Gender, typically described in terms of masculinity and femininity, is a social construction that varies across different cultures and over time. There are a number of cultures, for example, in which greater gender diversity exists and sex and gender are not always neatly divided along binary lines such as male and female or homosexual and heterosexual. The Berdache[4] in North America, the fa'afafine (Samoan for "the way of a woman") in the Pacific, and the kathoey in Thailand are all examples of different gender categories that differ from the traditional Western division of people into males and females. Further, among certain North American native communities, gender is seen more in terms of a continuum than categories, with special acknowledgement of "two-spirited" people who encompass both masculine and feminine qualities and characteristics. It is apparent, then, that different cultures have taken different approaches to creating gender distinctions, with more or less recognition of fluidity and complexity of gender. (para. 3)

It is tempting to apply the terms 'transgender' and 'nonbinary' to such people for convenience of discussion, but this may be a problem. Much discourse has surrounded this issue, and the general

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[4] Please note that 'berdache' is actually considered a derogatory term because of the negative connotations associated with it (O'Brien, 2009). The WHO's use of this term evidences the fact that even well-respected organizations are not always aware of accepted language in gender minority communities.

consensus is that as other cultures' concepts of gender can be quite different from the Western understanding of gender, it is problematic to assume that these cultures have 'transgender' or 'nonbinary' people unless those people have adopted those terms for themselves (e.g., Feinberg, 1992; Towle & Morgan, 2006; Stryker, 2017).

As important as non-Western gender phenomena are, I will presently be focusing on European American trans history because it is more directly relevant to my research, which has been conducted with the Western operationalized understanding of transgender people. Thus, I will be focusing on important moments in European American transgender history, especially those that have occurred in the last 100 years.

Looking back through the centuries that preceded the coining of the term 'transgender,' it seems that there were many people who likely would have been considered trans by today's standards, from people assigned female at birth who transitioned to find security in traditionally male fields of labor to people assigned male at birth who refused to conform to society's standards of dress for men. When their birth gender was revealed by accident or on purpose, these people faced discrimination and harassment, often having their safety violated by people who did not understand gender nonconformity (Stryker, 2006; Towle & Morgan, 2006).

In the early 1900s, some medical doctors started opening their minds to providing services for transgender individuals to allow them to be their true selves. One of the most notable early trans-supportive medical professionals was a German doctor named Magnus Hirschfield. He was influential in creating the first scientific journal about queer people, wrote one of the first books about medical treatment of trans people, and orchestrated some of the first documented gender-affirming surgeries on transgender individuals. Sadly, the vast majority of his work was destroyed by Nazis, and Adolf Hitler himself was recorded condemning Dr. Hirschfield as "the most dangerous Jew in Germany" (as quoted in Stryker, 2017). A well-recognized associate of Dr. Hirschfield was Dr. Harry Benjamin; he was one of the reasons that not all of Dr. Hirschfield's knowledge was lost to the Nazi's bigoted and hateful actions. When he moved to the United States, Dr. Benjamin was the first known doctor to prescribe hormones to transgender teenagers, which is a treatment that saves lives by alleviating gender dysphoria. His most famous

accomplishment was writing the book *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (1966), which informed much of the care offered by other doctors to trans people for decades, even after his death. These are just two of the most important trans-friendly doctors from the early to mid-1900s (Stryker, 2017).

Another important figure in early modern trans history was Virginia Prince, a trans woman who started social groups for other trans people and started the first politically influential transgender-issue-related magazine, *Transvestia*. Christine Jorgensen might be the most well-known trans woman of that time, though. Although gender-affirming genital surgery for people assigned male at birth had been done a number of times before, Jorgensen's surgery was the first to attract the attention of the media, and she became famous for being a passing[5] transgender woman whose surgery was very successful for the time period (Stryker, 2017). This attention to trans women opened doors for other trans individuals to find support and discover communities of their own.

It is noteworthy that as described above and as Stryker (2017) discusses in her book, the most well-known, influential figures in modern trans history have been cisgender white male medical professionals and transgender women. Transgender women of color specifically played a crucial role in effecting positive change not only for trans people but also for the LGBTQ+ community as a whole. Many people are aware of how trans women of color such as Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson were involved with the Compton Cafeteria Riots, the Stonewall Riots, and the first Gay Pride events, but it is necessary to further note that transgender women have also been the catalysts for initiatives to connect trans people with their communities, to train police in how to work with trans people, and to propose laws for protecting trans people (Stryker, 2017).

Compared to trans women, trans men's rise to visibility was relatively slow. It is possible that at least part of the reason for this is that trans men could hide in the shadows, passing without question, while trans women were more visually noticeable and less socially acceptable. In fact, it was not until the 1960s-1970s that transgender men started appearing in the public eye as

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[5] 'Passing' is a term used to refer to trans people who, according to general societal expectations, appear to be cisgender and rarely get misgendered. It is noteworthy that passing is not a goal for all trans people, and it is important to recognize and accept non-passing transgender individuals.

supporters of rights for queer people. Reed Erickson, a wealthy trans man, funded some of the first trans support groups and medical clinics. Also, Mario Martino became known as the first trans man to start female-to-male trans support groups, and he published the first biography of a trans man. Lou Sullivan, a gay trans man, was important in documenting queer history in small communities, and he represented trans people to medical professionals in an attempt to depathologize transgender identities (Stryker, 2017). Thanks to men such as these, people who were assigned female at birth have also had the opportunity to understand their own gender and see that they, too, fit into our society and the trans community.

One of the most negatively influential events in modern trans history was Janice Raymond's 1979 publication of *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*, a book that reversed much of the progress had been made toward trans inclusion in feminist circles and, to an extent, still impedes the growth of trans acceptance by feminists. In this book, Raymond claimed that all trans people "rape women's bodies" by "penetrating" women's spaces and "appropriating" the female body (pp. 103–104). Although to this day, trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs) like Raymond have a small but loud presence in the feminist community, there has been pushback against the exclusion of trans people in feminist circles.

In the 1970s, trans musicians Beth Elliot and Sandy Stone made bold stands against TERFs, and since then, many trans people have stepped into the public spotlight in hopes of fostering a positive perception of trans people (Stryker, 2017). Additionally, impactful transgender and trans-supportive researchers and writers have made a name for themselves in both public and academic circles. Stephen Whittle, Susan Stryker, and Leslie Feinberg are three of the most influential trans writers in academia (e.g., Whittle, 2006). Whittle is a leader in fighting for legal rights for trans people and helped put together the first *Transgender Studies Reader* (2006) with Susan Stryker, who wrote *Transgender History* (2008, 2017) and is an editor for *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* (2014-present). Feinberg made waves with hir publication of *Stone Butch Blues* (1991) and *Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come* (1992, quoted above), and zie was influential in developing a cultural understanding of the term 'transgender'. Sandy Stone, the musician mentioned above, also impacted trans studies with her 1992 essay "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttransseual Manifesto." While she is not trans,

Judith Butler has also made a difference for academics' (and popular culture's) understanding of trans individuals with her work on gender theory, especially her 1990 publication of *Gender Trouble*, which delves into the performative nature of gender.

Most recently, strides toward transgender inclusion and acceptance have been made in medical communities and the media. "Gender Identity Disorder" was declassified as a disorder and relabeled "Gender Dysphoria" in the 2013 update of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, the leading guide for understanding mental illness. The American Medical Association has announced positions in support of trans people, the World Professional Association for Transgender Health has grown, and many transgender health clinics have been established across the USA. In mainstream media, trans people such as Laverne Cox, Caitlyn Jenner, and Chaz Bono have brought attention to transgender issues. More and more television shows have cast transgender characters in a positive (or at least neutral) light, such as *Orange is the New Black*, *Glee*, and *Sense8* (Capuzza & Spencer, 2017). This visibility is crucial to trans people — especially trans youth — in letting them know that they are not alone and that living life as a trans person is possible.

That said, the current societal situation of trans people is not particularly positive overall. There is an epidemic of the murder of trans people (especially trans women of color), and it is underreported by the media. Between October 2018 and September 2019, 331 transgender or gender diverse people were reported to be murdered worldwide (TGEU, 2019). Additionally, in 2015, National Center for Transgender Equality researchers collected data from over 27,000 trans individuals from the United States. This was the first massive survey of trans people to ever be done, and it revealed an abundance of harrowing information about trans individuals' experiences with poverty, harassment, assault, and health issues such as AIDS. This study also revealed a massive suicide epidemic in the trans community: nearly 40% of trans people have attempted suicide at least once in their lives (James et al., 2016). Untimely death is devastatingly common in trans communities, whether it occurs by murder or suicide.

In memory of these trans people's deaths, Gwendolyn Ann Smith, a transgender activist, initiated the Transgender Day of Remembrance in 1999 (GLAAD, 2019). Every year since then,

November 20th has been a day to honor the trans people whose lives ended too soon. Vigils and memorials are organized across the world on that day, and these events draw awareness to the plight of anti-trans violence. The counterpart holiday to this is Transgender Day of Visibility, which was started 10 years later by Rachel Crandall (Schmider, 2017). This day of visibility focuses on celebrating trans people who are living, regardless of whether they are out or not, while still acknowledging and drawing attention to trans issues of poverty, homelessness, violence, and discrimination. Transgender Day of Visibility is celebrated at the end of March every year. These two holidays go hand in hand and reflect the duality of trans existence: celebration and pride for life and remembrance of the many whose lives have been lost or taken.

Political and legislative efforts to protect and include trans people have varied greatly over the last couple of decades, going back and forth between positive movements and massive setbacks. The long-debated and yet-to-be-passed Employment Non-Discrimination Act was repeatedly changed to include and exclude trans rights over the years. While hundreds of cities and counties have put in place protections for trans people, there is a striking lack of legal support for transgender individuals across the United States. During his presidency, Barack Obama made strides to protect trans people, but much of the progress that was made during his time in office has been reversed since the election of Donald Trump in 2016. For example, during the Obama administration, transgender status was protected under anti-discrimination rules of the Affordable Care Act, but the Trump administration ruled to reverse those protections, announcing that healthcare discrimination laws do not, in fact, protect transgender individuals (Fitzsimons, 2019). This discrepancy in legal support and lack of support for trans people points to the conflict between the left and right sides of the political spectrum, how radicalized both sides have become, and the harm that that can bring to trans individuals.[6]

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[6] A discussion of recent trans history and laws would not be complete without addressing 'the bathroom problem', an issue that is unfortunately extremely prevalent in the trans community and cis people's discussions of trans individuals. 'The bathroom problem' refers to the regulation of what bathroom trans people are allowed to use and the difficulties (e.g., harassment and assault) faced by trans people when trying to access bathrooms. Some states have legislation restricting transgender people's access to restrooms. According to the National Center for Transgender Equality's 2015 survey, 59% of trans people sometimes or always avoid using public restrooms because of their gender identity, and of those people, 13% reported experiencing kidney issues such as urinary tract infections as a result of their lack of access to bathrooms. Restrooms are also a common place for trans people to experience verbal, sexual, and physical harassment and assault (James et al., 2016). While numerous low-cost solutions to the bathroom problem have been proposed, fearmongering about trans people (especially trans women)

Finally, some recent events in transgender history include Chelsea Manning's 2010 WikiLeaks release of classified military information, her conviction, mistreatment in prison, and her eventual release in 2020 (e.g., see Biography.com, 2020); the 2016 Pulse Nightclub massacre which left over a hundred queer people dead or wounded, some of whom were trans (e.g., see Ellis et al., 2016); and the 2017 Women's March, which was explicitly supportive of trans women and featured multiple transgender speakers (though some aspects of it tended toward trans exclusion, such as the prevalence of genital essentialist 'pussy hats') (e.g., see Greer, 2017; Shamus, 2018). These events are all important because of the attention they have brought to transgender people and how they have catalyzed movements toward legal and personal support for trans individuals.

Upon examining trans history, it has become clear to me that despite the tumultuous, violent, heartbreaking history of trans people in the United States, halting but forward steps toward transgender equality and liberation are being made. I believe it is important to recognize and honor the magnitude of trans women of color's contributions to trans rights and history because they often go unrecognized in LGTBQ+ histories. I also believe that it is necessary for trans people and those who care about us to remain hopeful and continue the "fight-back movement" for transgender individuals that Leslie Feinberg (1992, p. 22) observed and anticipated.

This brief introduction to trans history places my work into the social frame in which it sits. Further, this history facilitates an understanding of the foundation on which attitudes toward trans people are built, and it reveals the necessity of studying those attitudes.

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and a general lack of concern from cis people have lead to very few changes being made in the availability of gender-neutral restrooms and protections for trans people's right to use the bathroom they prefer (Stryker, 2017).

ATTITUDES TOWARD TRANSGENDER INDIVIDUALS AND AVERSIVE PREJUDICE THEORY

> "After consultation with my Generals and military experts, please be advised that the United States Government will not accept or allow...... ....Transgender individuals to serve in any capacity in the U.S. Military. Our military must be focused on decisive and overwhelming..... ....victory and cannot be burdened with the tremendous medical costs and disruption that transgender in the military would entail. Thank you" – Donald Trump (2017), via Twitter

There are many ways in which attitudes toward transgender individuals can be assessed, such as examining data about trans people's experiences with harassment and discrimination (e.g., James et al., 2016), considering legislation that affects transgender individuals (e.g., National Center for Transgender Equality [NCTE], 2019), and measuring overt and implicit attitudes in empirical research studies (e.g., Morrison et al., 2017; Wang-Jones et al., 2017).

As I hinted at in the previous section about transgender history, trans people face extreme levels of oppression from both society and the government. Perhaps the richest data demonstrating this fact has come from the 2016 publication of a survey of nearly 28,000 transgender individuals from the United States (James et al., 2016). One key finding of this study was that about three fourths of transgender youth in K-12 schools have either experienced unfair discipline for being trans or have been survivors of verbal, sexual, or physical harassment/assault or both. One tenth of the trans people surveyed experienced violence at the hands of their families after they came out. Additionally, about half of all trans people have been sexually assaulted sometime in their lives (James et al., 2016). These statistics speak to the pervasive negative attitudes toward trans people held by adults in positions of power, peers of trans children, and more generally, any people who interact with transgender individuals.

It is also possible to see these negative attitudes in action at a societal level, as in the last few years since Donald Trump was elected President, protections for trans people have been actively disassembled and restrictions on trans access to resources and opportunities have been put into place. For example, in the Spring of 2019, the Department of Defense adopted President Trump's ban on transgender people in the military. This is a decision that President Trump first

tweeted about in 2017 (as quoted above). Additionally, under the Trump administration, the Department of Housing and Urban Development started planning to remove rules that protected trans people from discrimination at homeless shelters (NCTE, 2019). Further, individual states have introduced legislation that explicitly discriminates against transgender people. For example, just in 2019 and 2020, Tennessee put forth nine anti-transgender bills such as ones that require students in activities and actions separated by gender to only utilize facilities and do activities that align with the sex they were assigned at birth, and Missouri introduced eight such bills, several of which include bans against providing medical intervention for trans youth (Freedom For All Americans, 2020).

While these are good ways to get a glimpse at people's attitudes toward trans people, empirically measuring attitudes is more ideal, and while it is important, it is also difficult. Social science researchers have often turned to overt attitude scales as a way to examine prejudice against people groups, and while these scales may fail to detect ingrained prejudices, they do offer a solid understanding of what survey respondents will agree to say about their thoughts on groups of people.

Currently, one of the most widely cited scales for measuring attitudes toward transgender individuals is one developed by Walch et al. (2012). Despite being published less than a decade ago, much of the language in this measure is already outdated and even could be considered offensive as it refers to "transgendered" people and implies that trans people are merely "cross dressing" when they wear gender-affirming clothing.[7] Regardless of its shortcomings, it is one of the only preexisting scales that focuses on assessing attitudes toward transgender individuals; thus, it is a valuable tool. I will return to this scale in my description of the methods of my own research study, as it is the one I used for my survey.

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[7] The term 'transgendered' is considered, at best, a suboptimal, and at worst, an incredibly offensive term to refer to trans people. The reason for this is that the '-ed' ending implies that 'transgender' — an adjective — is actually a verb; something that happens to trans people. You wouldn't refer to Black people as 'blacked' or Autistic people as 'Autisticed' because their minority status is not something that is done to them; it is a descriptor of them. So, generally, transgender individuals prefer that 'trans' or 'transgender' are used as adjectives to refer to them. This is also why 'trans' as an adjective is not compounded with 'man' or 'woman' (i.e., the currently accepted terminology is 'trans man' and 'trans woman' rather than 'transman' and 'transwoman') (Lopez, 2015).

A recent review of scales for measuring attitudes toward transgender individuals was published by Morrison et al. (2017). According to their analyses, at the time of their study, a scale revised by psychologists from the University of Florida was the most optimal scale for measuring prejudice against transgender people (Tebbe et al., 2014). (Unfortunately, this scale was popularized after the data in this thesis were collected.) Scales such as these are one of the main ways in which researchers examine explicit attitudes toward trans people.

Some general research findings about explicit attitudes toward transgender people have demonstrated that students are less willing to help transgender peers than cisgender peers (Carroll et al., 2012); authoritarianism predicts greater prejudice against trans people (Adams et al., 2016; Norton & Herek, 2013); homophobia is strongly related to prejudice against transgender individuals (Willoughby et al., 2010); men and less well-educated people are more likely to discriminate against trans people (Norton & Herek, 2013; Elischberger et al., 2016); and finally, politically conservative people and straight people are more likely to be prejudiced against trans people than liberals and people of a queer sexual orientation (QSO) (McCullough et al., 2019).[8]

There are some discrepancies across studies about whether or not age is related to attitudes toward trans people; for example, Elischberger et al. (2016) found that older people have more anti-trans discriminatory tendencies than younger people, but Willoughby et al. (2010) found no such relationship. This could be because Elischberger et al. (2016) had a wider range of older participants and greater mean age of participants than Willoughby et al. (2010) or because Elischberger et al. (2016) used more advanced statistical methods to more accurately analyze age effects. This discrepancy between the two studies' findings could also, perhaps, exist because the two studies used different methods for assessing attitudes and discriminatory behavior, which makes it somewhat difficult to draw parallels between them. Despite these differences in

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[8] 'Queer sexual orientations' (QSOs) include multitudes of sexual orientations such as bisexual, gay, lesbian, pansexual, asexual, demisexual, polysexual, generally queer, multi-orientation, and so on. For the present purposes, it is important to differentiate between the part of the LGBTQ+ community that is queer but cisgender and the part of the community that falls under the transgender umbrella. The two communities experience somewhat different forms of marginalization, and trans people face forms of discrimination and oppression that QSO people do not experience. Sometimes, QSO people and trans people even find themselves at odds with each other, and trans people are sometimes purposely or accidentally excluded from supposedly LGB*T*Q+ spaces. That said, QSO and trans communities overlap and are intertwined, and more often than not, they do support each other.

methods, analyses, and participant demographics, I believe it is possible to compare the two studies because they do assess similar variables. Beyond the already-mentioned potential issues with the Willoughby et al. (2010) study, when considering which studies are most likely to have found accurate results about the relationship between age and attitudes toward transgender people, it should be taken into consideration that, over time, research on trans people has become more sophisticated and accurate, and anecdotally, trans people indicate that older people are less accepting of them. Thus, I believe it is quite likely that age does impact anti-trans prejudice.

Much of the research on openly expressed attitudes toward trans people has focused on prejudice against transgender individuals in sports and healthcare as well as how familiarity and exposure to transgender people influences attitudes toward them. For example, in a longitudinal study that took place from 2007 to 2014, Cunningham and Pickett (2018) examined how student athletes' attitudes toward trans people in sports differ from attitudes toward people with a QSO, and they found that while both prejudice against trans and QSO people has decreased over time, anti-transgender prejudice has decreased less than anti-QSO prejudice.

As for discrimination against transgender individuals in healthcare settings, Rodriguez et al. (2018) investigated what factors made transgender people more likely to experience discrimination during emergency room visits and doctor's appointments and while accessing social services. First, overall, about one third of trans people reported having been discriminated against in healthcare settings (Rodriguez et al., 2018). Also, the researchers found that being recognized as transgender, being any ethnicity or race other than white, having been to prison, being HIV positive, having been assigned male at birth, and being a sex worker all significantly increased the level of perceived discrimination people experienced during health appointments and emergencies (Rodriguez et al., 2018). Essentially, almost any individual difference that could make someone more marginalized increased the likelihood that a trans person would experience discrimination in healthcare settings.

Further, in a study by Romanelli et al. (2018), it was found that over one fifth of trans people had been denied services in doctors' offices, mental health clinics, or emergency rooms, and denial of services increased the likelihood of attempting suicide and using alcohol or substances to

cope. Additionally, about 30% of transgender individuals delay seeking health services because they are worried about anti-transgender discrimination or do not even attempt to get help with medical issues, and trans people who have to educate their medical providers on transgender issues are even more likely to avoid getting health services (Jaffee et al., 2016).

Another important factor contributing to attitudes toward trans people is the amount of contact a person has had with QSO people and transgender individuals. Gordon Allport's contact hypothesis outlines how having positive intergroup interactions with people of a marginalized identity decreases prejudice and discrimination against that group of marginalized people; initially, this hypothesis focused on race relations, but in the nearly 70 years since Allport introduced it, it has been shown to apply to many marginalized people, including queer individuals (e.g., Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Thus, it is unsurprising that having exposure to trans people makes cis people less likely to be prejudiced against transgender individuals (e.g., King et al., 2009). Somewhat less obvious is the fact that even having contact with cisgender QSO people can have a positive influence on attitudes toward trans individuals, and further, just seeing trans people portrayed in media was related to having less anti-trans prejudice (Hoffarth & Hodson, 2018). That said, trans people are not particularly visible in society; only 37% of Americans believe they know a trans person (Brown, 2017). Thus, it is important that other variables — such as media representation and contact with QSO people — can lessen the effect of prejudice against trans people (Hoffarth & Hodson, 2018).

The studies reviewed thus far focus on explicit attitudes toward transgender individuals. This research is crucial to our understanding of trans people, but research regarding implicit prejudices is also necessary for a more complete understanding of attitudes toward transgender people because it allows us to see what people truly believe about trans people rather than only what they are willing to explicitly express. Implicit biases are non-conscious beliefs about and attitudes toward another group of people; these biases do not always reflect a person's conscious or expressed attitudes, and they are acted upon without personal awareness (Kirwan Institute, 2015). Research on implicit biases against trans people is very new, so our ability to measure

such prejudices is still developing. In psychological research, implicit association tests (IATs) are one of the most common ways to measure implicit biases; millions of research participants have completed various IATs since they were first introduced in 1998 (Sleek, 2018).

The first IAT for measuring anti-trans prejudice was created by Wang-Jones et al. (2017), and the psychometric properties of their test aligned with the development of other IATs, suggesting that it is a sound measure of implicit anti-trans prejudice. They found that implicit and explicit attitudes toward trans people were highly correlated with each other, and unsurprisingly, conservatives, cisgender people, and those who do not believe they know any trans people were most likely to prefer cis people over trans people in the IAT (Wang-Jones et al., 2017). In a follow-up study, Wang-Jones et al. (2018) found that QSO people generally expressed overt support for trans people, but their IATs revealed that they actually have prejudice against both transgender men and women, though the extent of their prejudice was less than that of their straight counterparts. These findings reflect the fact that, sometimes, people harbor implicit prejudices that they are either unwilling to express or are not conscious of.

Even more recently, some researchers who are critical of the IAT due to its multitasking complexity, its reliance on response times for results, and its necessity to compare one group to another rather than evaluating a group independently have worked on developing a new, simpler test for investigating implicit prejudices against trans people called the Transgender Affect Misattribution Procedure (Transgender AMP) (Kanamori et al., 2019). Like the IAT developed to measure anti-trans prejudice, the Transgender AMP was found to be psychometrically sound and internally reliable, and the researchers found similar results to other studies on biases against transgender individuals, such as the effect of contact with trans people on attitudes toward them (Kanamori et al., 2019).

That said, even according to proponents of the AMP (e.g., Kanamori et al., 2019), the IAT is still the most commonly used implicit attitudes measure. One particularly relevant study that used the IAT to measure attitudes toward transgender people was conducted by Li (2019) in an experiment that examined how reading a news article about a trans woman with a traditionally male or traditionally female name and 'he/him' or 'she/her' pronouns impacted participants'

implicit and explicit attitudes toward trans people. They found that using a male name and female pronouns together brought forth participants' most negative implicit attitudes toward trans people, while neither names nor pronouns had an effect on explicit attitude reporting (Li, 2019). Also, using a traditionally female name and 'she/her' pronouns predicted more positive responses about perceived credibility and reporter professionalism. Ultimately, the Li (2019) study is incredibly important because it demonstrates that the names and pronouns used to refer to a trans person are related to study participants' implicit biases against trans people.

This link between pronoun use and implicit attitudes toward trans people brings forth a theory that is central to my research: aversive prejudice theory. Aversive prejudice theory could be used to argue that attitudes toward and use of trans people's pronouns is an indication of implicit attitudes toward transgender individuals. Before we can understand how it applies in the transgender context, we must review the theory itself.

Aversive prejudice theory ascribes to the idea that prejudice can be expressed indirectly — and even nonconsciously — by a person attributing their dislike for a people group to some other issue. Aversively prejudiced individuals often express explicitly positive attitudes toward a marginalized group even though they hold implicit biases against that group (Pearson et al., 2009). In the past, aversive prejudice theory research has mostly focused on racism (e.g., Gawronski et al., 2008). A classic example of aversive racism is someone saying they have no problem with African American people; they just dislike when people abuse the welfare system. But in reality, the problem is that they are prejudiced against African Americans.

It is important to note that, over time, people have expressed progressively less blatant prejudice against marginalized groups; however, discrimination against those groups has improved little in recent decades (Pearson et al., 2009). This has led researchers to believe that less marginalized people still hold biases against those groups. According to Pearson et al. (2009), there are severe consequences of these implicit biases, especially because people who believe they are unbiased see no reason to work toward improving the treatment of marginalized groups of people.

One of the ways in which this impacts minority groups includes how people are or are not willing to help others in emergency situations. For example, in emergency situations, white people are more likely to help other white people than to help Black people when not helping could be excused by factors that have nothing to do with race (Kunstman & Plant, 2008). Another negative impact of implicit biases is that less marginalized people are less likely to select more marginalized people in hiring situations. A specific example of this is that white people are more likely to hire a white job candidate than an Asian candidate when the two interviewees have similar qualifications and the decision could be justified by non-racial motives (Son Hing et al., 2008). Essentially, when a situation could be ostensibly non-race-related, racial prejudice emerges, and then, white people are more likely to prefer other white people instead of people from racial minorities (Pearson et al., 2009).

Additionally, marginalized people are able to detect implicit biases against them. For example, in various research studies, it has been found that Black and white participants rated the same interaction differently in situations where the white participants hold implicit anti-Black prejudice despite their explicit acceptance of Black people. In such studies, Black participants are less satisfied and more uncomfortable with the conversation than the white participants (e.g., Dovidio et al., 2002). These examples demonstrate the significant impact that implicit biases of people who attempt to be non-prejudiced can have on marginalized people.

It is noteworthy that the vast majority of the time, these subtle forms of discrimination are not purposeful but rather are a result of nonconscious processes and implicit biases against marginalized groups. Many aversively prejudiced people actually express explicit support for minority groups, value egalitarianism, and tend to be politically liberal, and, as Pearson et al. (2009) succinctly stated, "Aversive racists [...] recognize prejudice as harmful, but they do not recognize that *they* are prejudiced" (p. 325).

While the majority of research on aversive prejudice theory has focused on race relations, it has also been applied in queer contexts. Researchers (e.g., Hoffarth & Hodson, 2014) have often drawn parallels between marginalized racial groups and QSO people, applying aversive

prejudice theory to both groups similarly. Generally, scholars have called aversive prejudice against QSO people 'aversive heterosexism' (e.g., Walls, 2008).

Research on aversive heterosexism has revealed results extremely similar to those found in aversive racism studies. For example, Nadler et al. (2014) found that mock hiring committees preferred straight job applicants when they did not have to justify their reasons for hiring a candidate, but when they did have to explain their decision, they hired gay and straight applicants at the same rate. These findings held true regardless of participants' explicit attitudes toward QSO individuals, as would be expected from an aversive prejudice theory perspective (Nadler et al., 2014). Similar results were found by Coons and Espinoza (2018) in a study on jury decision making in which prejudice against QSO people emerged when harsher verdicts could be explained by a factor other than defendants' sexual orientations.

These examples demonstrate that aversive prejudice theory can be applied to queer populations. These studies focus on QSO people, not trans people. While there are differences between QSO communities and the trans community, there are also many parallels to be drawn between them, as the two marginalized groups are often combined together as the 'LGBTQ+' or 'queer' community as a whole. Thus, it is logical that aversive prejudice theory could apply to bias against transgender people in addition to QSO people.

As exemplified by the above review of literature on attitudes toward marginalized people, there are many ways in which subtle, implicit prejudices can be expressed. In my research, I will show that aversive prejudice theory could be applied to how people express subtle biases against transgender individuals in this way: it is possible that people may say that they have no prejudice against nonbinary transgender people; they just strongly believe that 'they' cannot be used as a singular pronoun because of their ideals of how people "should" use language the "right way". In reality, the problem for those people is that they are biased against transgender individuals.

In order to look into how attitudes toward pronouns — specifically 'they' as a singular pronoun — are important for studying prejudice against transgender people, we must first take a look at the history and functions of linguistic prescriptivism (the idea that there is a "right" and "wrong"

way to use language) because that is a key factor in the way people view using 'they' as a singular pronoun and in how prescriptivism might allow people to mask their biases against trans individuals.

GRAMMAR STICKLERS AND THEIR PRESCRIPTIVE GRAMMAR MENTALITY

> "Getting your itses mixed up is the greatest solecism in the world of punctuation. No matter that you have a PhD and have read all of Henry James twice. If you still persist in writing, 'Good food at it's best', you deserve to be struck by lightning, hacked up on the spot and buried in an unmarked grave." – Lynne Truss (2003, pp. 43–44), *Eats, Shoots and Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*

As is clear from Lynne Truss' above remarks, some people have passionate feelings about using language in a particular way — a way that they see as "grammatically correct". This strongly held belief that there is a right and a wrong way to use language is often referred to as a 'prescriptive grammar mentality'. Prescriptivists, or more colloquially, "grammar sticklers", will often piously tell people how they should speak and write, believing that they have a superior understanding of what is "proper" and "improper" in a language (Straaijer, 2016). A contrasting viewpoint to prescriptivism is descriptivism, which is a perspective held by many linguists. Descriptivists believe that rather than telling people how to use language, it is better to merely describe how they speak and write (Beal, 2009).

It is noteworthy that, in addition to spoken language issues, grammar sticklers call popular writing conventions such as punctuation and capitalization 'grammar'. This contrasts with what descriptivist linguists refer to as 'linguistic grammaticality', which essentially is the notion of whether or not something is deemed as sensical in a certain language, whether it be written or spoken (*Language Files*, 2016). For example, "Car go the," is not grammatical in Standard American English. Grammar sticklers would be offended by this utterance, and descriptivists would deem it 'ungrammatical' because it does not make sense in English. On the other hand, grammar sticklers would say that a sentence like, "It is bad to unthinkingly break the speed limit irregardless of why you might want to," is wrong because it splits the infinitive 'to break' with the adverb 'unthinkingly' and uses the word 'irregardless', which prescriptivists say is not a word. Descriptivists, however, would say that that sentence is perfectly acceptable because the average English user would find no fault with it.

So, where did these two incredibly opposite camps come from? Why do so many people have such strong feelings about language? Is prescriptivism beneficial to society in any way? There is actually a rich, fascinating history to linguistic prescriptivism, and when the subject is viewed through that historical lens, it is possible to understand why prescriptivism is so popular and how it can be both problematic and beneficial. Most importantly, though, as we look into the dark side to prescriptivism, we can see that linguistic prescriptivism can be used as a shield to hide or justify biases against marginalized groups such as people of color, poor people, and immigrants (Straaijer, 2016).

In order to understand the history of prescriptivism, it is helpful to look back to the grammarians of the 1700s, who, like modern prescriptivists, addressed not only spoken language issues but also writing conventions as part of "proper grammar". One of the earliest grammar sticklers that modern scholars are aware of was Jonathan Swift, who, in 1712, wrote:

> [O]ur Language is extremely imperfect; that its daily Improvements are by no means in proportion to its daily Corruptions; and the Pretenders to polish and refine it, have chiefly multiplied Abuses and Absurdities; and, that in many Instances, it offends against every Part of Grammar (as cited in Greene, 2011, p. 25).

Swift's condemnation of the "Corruptions," "Abuses," and "Absurdities," of the English language set the stage for the attitudes of the grammar sticklers to come. It is interesting to see that while Swift is a notable historical prescriptivist, his views on "proper grammar" in writing actually vastly differ from today's grammar sticklers' perspectives. This can be seen in the above quotation, which contains seemingly random capitalization, commas in locations disapproved of by sticklers, and semicolons galore. This foreshadows a point to be made later: that both written and spoken language change, whether prescriptivists like it or not.

Coming into the spotlight just a few decades after Swift, the descriptivist Samuel Johnson gained notoriety when he wrote the first popularly consumed dictionary, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, in 1755. Johnson's dictionary was vastly different from many of the works about English from the same time period; it attempted to merely describe how people used language without prescribing a correct or incorrect manner of speaking (Greene, 2011). Perhaps Johnson's most infamous and opposite contemporary was a prescriptivist by the name of Robert Lowth. He

was one of the first grammar-focused writers to explicitly state how language "should" be used, and while some modern scholars believe that he was not as bad as descriptivist linguists often make him out to be (Beal, 2009), it is undeniable that he had a long-term impact on the world of linguistic prescriptivism, as his writings about grammar were influential for decades after his death, and, to this day, he continues to be cited as an important grammarian from the 1700s (Fens-De Zeeuw, 2018).

If there were one historical prescriptivist that is more well recognized than Robert Lowth, though, it would have to be Lindley Murray. In 1795, Murray wrote his *English Grammar,* which sold about two million copies during his lifetime and the two decades following his death (Fens-De Zeeuw, 2018). He was one of the first grammar sticklers to introduce morality into the discussion of language use; he viewed people who (in his opinion) misused grammar as morally inferior or "depraved" (Greene, 2011, p. 33). Even though authors like Harriet Beecher Stowe, Charles Dickens, and Oscar Wilde cited Murray's influence on their writing, and a handful of modern style guides still reference his work, Murray is easily the historical prescriptivist most criticized by other historical grammarians and modern descriptivists alike; his work has been parodied and mocked ever since a book called *The Bad English of Lindley Murray and Other Writers* came out in 1868 (Fens-De Zeeuw, 2018).

There was something of a break in the popularity of linguistic prescriptivism from the mid-1800s to the 1920s. While a handful of grammar texts were written in that time, they were not as well-known as those that came before and after them. The next most famous past grammar sticklers were William Strunk and E. B. White (most well-recognized for his writing of *Charlotte's Web* in 1952). These two authors ushered in a time of realism about prescriptivist ideals; while they forcefully prescribed grammar rules in their guide *The Elements of Style* (1920), they conceded that language does, indeed, change over time and that rules will always be broken (Greene, 2011). Strunk and White are still famous, and their grammar book continues to be used after nearly a century of updates and new editions. Taking a similar approach to Strunk and White, Henry Watson Fowler wrote *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage* in 1926. Fowler, too, was a die-hard prescriptivist who still was aware of the reality of language change (Greene, 2011).

A few decades later, two of the most important dictionaries to ever be written came out: *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (*W3*; 1961) and the *American Heritage Dictionary* (*AHD*; 1969). *Webster's Third* had a mixed reception, as it was a profoundly descriptivist piece of literature. Some people lauded it as innovative — a representative of the current state of the English language and a phenomenal piece of lexicography — while others saw it as overly permissive and weak in direction, especially scorning its inclusion of the word 'ain't' (Faris, 1970). The publication of the *AHD* was essentially a rival's response to *W3* (Ottenhoff, 1996). Where *W3* gave examples of how people use certain terms, *AHD* told its readers how they should use those terms. *W3* included 'non-standard' words, while *AHD* eschewed them (Faris, 1970). *AHD* actually claimed to be "pure" in its prescriptivism, viewing descriptive linguists as the enemy of "proper" English.

Instead of looking to linguistics scholars for advice, the editors of *AHD* turned to their newly-formed Usage Panel to determine the morally judgmental "good" and "bad" ways to use English (Ottenhoff, 1996). The *AHD* Usage Panel was lauded as scientific, but in reality, it poorly represented the demographics of English speakers, as it was predominantly composed of highly educated, socially elite white senior men. It was hardly objective as it used biased means of determining prescriptions based on opinion, not on actual usage (Ottenhoff, 1996). While the Usage Panel was updated to be more inclusive of diverse English speakers over the years, it ultimately failed, and it was disbanded in 2018 (Skinner, 2018).

Despite the Usage Panel's failure, linguistic prescriptivism has not faded away. In 2003, Lynne Truss wrote the prescriptivist book *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*, which ended up becoming a New York Times bestseller (Greene, 2011). At the beginning of this chapter, there was a quotation from Truss in which she suggested that people who "misuse" written English, "deserve to be struck by lightning, hacked up on the spot and buried in an unmarked grave" (Truss, 2003, pp. 43–44). While it was intended to be taken as a joke, this quotation is nicely representative of the fervent attitudes of modern prescriptivists, some of which say such things in a less comedic tone, such as Shrier (2018), who unironically suggested that people who use the singular 'they' are, "committing sacrilege no less than bowing to idols in the town square" (para. 5).

While this type of language echoes that of plenty of modern prescriptivists, some others do take a less judgmental tone despite their strict adherence to prescriptivist conventions (Schaffer, 2010). Some sticklers still take themselves very seriously, but it is not uncommon for them to make light of the subject at hand, taking on humorous tones and incorporating puns, allusions, and funny language examples into their writing (Schaffer, 2010). In contrast to the grammar books of old, many currently popular prescriptivists use blogs or websites to disseminate their ideals, such as Grammar Girl, Grammarly, and The "Blog" of "Unnecessary" Quotation Marks. Ironically enough, a critical eye can find numerous "errors" made on these grammar sticklers' blogs (Schaffer, 2010). Perhaps the tone and mode of prescriptivist texts have changed over time, but the spirit and content have essentially remained the same, carrying on the 18th-19th century prescriptivists' "quest to improve English speakers' and writers' purity" (Schaffer, 2010, p. 28).

As for current descriptivists, some have turned to blogging as well, such as Dennis Baron with his Web of Language blog and Mark Liberman, who started the Language Log (e.g., Language Log, 2019; Baron, 2019). Additionally, many popular writing guides have taken a descriptive turn in recent years, such as Dictionary.com, Merriam-Webster, the American Psychological Association, and the Associated Press. This can be seen by these four organizations' embrace of the gender-neutral third-person singular pronoun 'they' (e.g., Merriam-Webster.com, 2019). As described above, the popularity of prescriptivism has fluctuated over the last three hundred years from its rise in the 1700s, to its approximately 75-year-long lull starting in 1850, to its 'resurgence' in the last few decades. Why, though, has prescriptivism maintained or regained popularity for so long? Is this a positive or negative thing for society?

First, simply put, linguistic prescriptivism sells. One of the main features of prescriptivism that is attractive to potential sticklers is diclinism: the notion that social phenomena (in this case, language) are steadily getting worse (Greene, 2011). It is not uncommon for grammar sticklers to complain about "kids these days" or to compare the current state of language, or at least writing conventions, to some cryptic past point that they idealize as when language was "pure" — a past point that often aligns with the prescriptivist's time of schooling (Greene, 2011). While this is a popular viewpoint, in reality, it is evidenced to be wrong. More people are literate today than ever have been before, and the global literacy rate is continuing to grow: according to

UNESCO's Institute for Statistics (2017), 86% of the world's population from the ages of 25-64 are literate, and 91% of young people from the ages of 15-24 are able to read and write. Of course, "proper" literacy skills are only one part of prescriptivist ideals, but can this vast majority of literate people really be using the written part of language "wrong"? Probably not. Perhaps, grammar sticklers are mistaking language change — in both writing and speaking — as language pejoration.

But can language really get "worse'"? According to most linguists, there is no moral value attached to language change; it simply is what it is: change (Campbell, 2013). There is no morality in "proper" and "improper" grammar, despite the fact that grammar sticklers and even many laypeople believe there is (Burridge, 2010). Of course, linguists are not the owners of absolute truths about language, but it is arguable that they are the people who best understand the role of language in society, so it is prudent to listen to their perspectives on language change, and generally, they believe that no language is better than another, there is no right or wrong way to use language, and regardless of whether prescriptivists like it or not, language changes over time (*Language Files*, 2016).

Even so, people want to have rules to follow about how to speak and write (MacKay, 1980). This is another reason why prescriptivism has remained popular for so long among scholars and laypeople alike (Beal, 2009). Prescriptive grammarians provide average writers and speakers with the structure that they crave, and grammar sticklers are more than happy to guide those people into their prescriptivist fold (Straaijer, 2016). In her writings, Beal (2009) suggests that modern-day prescriptivism is popular because of laypeople's desires to appear intelligent and of a high social class, and Beal equates this with the social culture in the 17-1800s when prescriptivism was born. Having a high-society dialect was and is seen as a way to improve oneself, and a "culture of 'self-improvement'" is a potential reason for the current resurgence of prescriptive grammar; it is easier for the average person with an interest in 'self-improvement' to follow already-laid-out rules than to try to find their own way to improve themselves (Beal, 2009, p. 14).

Further, an average member of the public might feel like following prescriptivist rules makes them morally superior to those who don't (Burridge, 2010), and the reality is that, whether descriptivist linguists like it or not, many people value grammar sticklers' rules so much that using (or not using) them can have a real impact on people's daily lives (Beal, 2009). For example, employees who use standard grammar conventions are seen as more valuable to their employers and are more likely to get hired, and people who do not follow grammar "rules" do worse in school (Straaijer, 2016). These are some good reasons to adhere to prescriptivist grammar rules.

Again, though, there are many negative effects of linguistic prescriptivism (Straaijer, 2016). An example of how blatant prejudice can be expressed via linguistic prescriptivism is that many people covey nationalistic attitudes via their language ideologies, especially those who believe in a standard language ideology (*Language Files*, 2016). White nationalists in the United States often complain that immigrants should learn how to speak English, and in other countries, there are even entire governmental organizations that aim to preserve and promote a national identity through a language (Greene, 2011). Unfortunately, this expression of bias against marginalized people and scorning of their language styles goes largely unnoticed by most people and is even socially acceptable (Beal, 2009)

The negative effects of linguistic prescriptivism can be more insidious, though. For example, people who are prejudiced against Black people might claim that they have no issue with Black people and that they merely do not approve of African American Vernacular English speakers "breaking the rules" of English grammar, when in reality, the problem is that they are prejudiced against Black people. In cases such as this, racists are able to express their discriminatory biases under the guise of being a grammar stickler, which is much more socially acceptable than being openly racist (Burridge, 2010). The same situation can happen with poor people; even well-intentioned liberals and leftists might express non-conscious prejudice against people of a lower socioeconomic status by complaining about their way of speaking.

I would argue that these are examples of aversive prejudice against marginalized people because, as we will see below, the above examples fit into the framework of how aversively prejudiced

individuals are often well-intentioned but unaware of how their biases affect their attitudes and actions.

Now that we have a basic understanding of the history and function of prescriptive grammar, we can delve into the history and current state of issues surrounding the use of 'they' as a singular pronoun, which is presently a hot topic among prescriptivists and descriptivists alike, due in part to how 'they' is used for nonbinary trans people. The following discussion of the history of and attitudes toward 'they' will lead us back into the application of aversive prejudice theory as it relates to attitudes toward transgender people.

THE HISTORY OF THE SINGULAR 'THEY' AND THE CURRENT STATE OF 'THEY'FFAIRS

> "For those with a religious conviction that sex is both biological and binary, God's purposeful creation," the singular 'they' "involves sacrilege no less than bowing to idols in the town square." – Shrier (2018, para. 5), *Wall Street Journal Opinions*

As exemplified by the above quotation (Shrier, 2018, para. 5), many people have very strong opinions about using 'they' as a gender-neutral third-person singular pronoun. It is not uncommon to see such quotations from self-proclaimed "grammar sticklers" — the lay term for people who have a strong prescriptive grammar mentality.

However, grammarians — even prescriptivists — have not always opposed the singular 'they', and it has been in use for hundreds of years. In fact, the first documented occurrence of 'they' as a singular pronoun occurred in *William of Parlene* in 1375 and, in the subsequent centuries, it has appeared in many historical texts such as *Three Kings Cologne* (1450) and *Pylgrimage of Perfection* (1526) (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2013). Even more notably, 'they' can be found as a singular pronoun in the works of such well-respected authors as Shakespeare, Chaucer, Jane Austen, and Charles Dickens (as cited in Benson, 2008; Churchyard, 2011; Stamper, 2018). Shrier (quoted above) might be surprised to discover that 'they' also appears in a singular context even in the King James Version of The Bible (e.g., Philippians 2:3, Deuteronomy 17:5). While there are prescriptive grammar texts from not long after the appearance of the singular 'they' in English, none of them have evidence of opposition to the singular 'they,' and it seems that the singular use of the pronoun went uncontested until the rise of the prescriptive grammar movement in the late 1700s and during the 1800s (Bodine, 1975).

While many arguments for the generic 'he' (which imply that the singular 'they' is incorrect) can be found starting in the 1500s (e.g., Wilson, 1560; as cited in Bodine, 1975), the first documented direct opposition to the singular 'they', to my knowledge, can be found in a 1795 text by Lindley Murray, who uses number agreement issues to argue against the singular 'they'. Subsequently, numerous prescriptivists began to agree that 'they' could only be plural (e.g., White, 1880). There is also evidence that part of the blame for 'they' becoming less accepted

may lie in the fact that androcentrism was even more ubiquitous in that era than it is now; the focus on the idea that men are better than women made it easy for people to claim that there is no issue with using 'he' as a supposedly gender-neutral pronoun instead of 'they' (Bodine, 1975).

Not everyone who opposed using 'they' as a singular pronoun thought that 'he' was acceptable for people of any gender, though. This led to many attempts to introduce alternative gender-neutral singular pronouns to the English language. In 1850, 'ne' and 'hiser' were suggested, though their use never caught on (Baron, 1981). Supposedly declared Word of the Year for 1884, 'thon' was marginally successful as a singular pronoun alternative, but its popularity was short-lived (Baron, 2018). More recently, 'it,' 'ze,' 'per,' 'hir,' (and the list goes on) have been proposed as 'neopronouns' to replace the singular 'they', but as with previous attempts to generate new pronouns, these have failed to become popular (Baron, 2020; Stamper, 2018). So, to this day, 'they' is the only truly gender-neutral third-person singular pronoun to remain in daily use for any significant amount of time.

Despite the long life and current popularity of the singular 'they', many people still oppose its use, such as a writer who complained that, "The singular they is ear-hurting, eye-burning, soul-ravaging, mind-numbing syntactic folly" (Doll, 2013, final para.). Additionally, some grammar guides and many English textbooks do not allow for using 'they' as a singular pronoun to refer to a person whose gender is unknown. Further, Shrier (2018; quoted above) expressed her conviction that using the pronoun is "sacrilege", particularly when used to refer to a transgender person.

This brings us to a discussion of what contexts the singular 'they' might appear in. For the present purposes, there are two contexts for the singular 'they' — the *generic* context in which the singular 'they' is indefinite or used to refer to someone whose gender is unknown or irrelevant — and the *queer* context in which the pronoun refers to someone whose gender is known and who prefers the pronoun 'they' for themselves because they do not identify as male or female. An example of the historical and present use of the singular 'they' in a generic context is that a speaker might observe that, "Someone left their water bottle there." In this example, the gender of the 'someone' is unknown. Conversely, an example of the queer 'they' is that someone

might express that, "Sam left their water bottle there." Here, Sam is a nonbinary transgender person who uses 'they' as their pronoun.

With these contexts in mind, we will see that a growing number of prescriptivists have one exception for their rule against using the singular 'they' — an allowance for its use in the queer context. This provision for the queer 'they' points to the fact that in the last half century or so, a partial semantic change has occurred in the way people use 'they' as a singular pronoun. While historically, it has been used in a generic context to refer to a person whose gender is unknown, as the shift in meaning happened, it became possible to use 'they' to refer to a specific nonbinary person.

The earliest recorded use of the singular 'they' for a specific person who is neither a man nor a woman is found in George Arnaud's 1750 publication of *A Dissertation on Hermaphrodites*.[9] While it is somewhat problematic to call a pronoun from 1750 'nonbinary', 'transgender', or 'queer' due to the massive changes in perceptions and understanding of gender over the last couple centuries, the appearance of the singular 'they' to refer to a specific, known person in Arnaud's dissertation is still noteworthy. That said, I and other scholars have failed to locate any citations for the queer 'they' in the 250 years after the earliest attestation and before the rise in visibility of nonbinary people that occurred around the new millennium.[10]

Although it is nigh unquestionable that the nonbinary singular 'they' was used before this and after Arnaud (1750), the next citation available for it is from 2005 in *The Daily Bruin*: "Kale Likover, subscribe[s] to the view that gender is socially constructed. They feel that even a [gender] spectrum is constricting because it ignores people who don't feel they fit anywhere between the two conventional genders" (Loewenstein, 2005, para. 6). That said, it seems that the queer 'they' did not fully gain traction until the 2010s, when it became the most popular pronoun for nonbinary people to use to refer to themselves (Cassian, 2019).

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[9] Please note that 'hermaphrodite' is not a modernly acceptable term.

[10] It is important to acknowledge that, in the discussion of earliest attestations, scholars are limited by the availability of written texts, and typically, people begin using words in speech long before they appear in print. Thus, it is likely that the singular 'they' is even older than its earliest attestations, and the examples above reflect language that was in use before it was written down.

As I will demonstrate in my research, there is evidence that this use of the singular 'they' for gender nonbinary individuals is actually very well-received by English speakers today — even more well-received than using 'they' as a singular pronoun in a general, gender-unknown context. The American Psychological Association (2019) strongly advocates for using both the general and the queer 'they', and a number of websites and style guides (e.g., *The Washington Post*, *Associated Press*) have begun to allow for the singular 'they' in any context. Dictionary.com (2018) recently published an article entitled, "It's OK To Use 'They' To Describe One Person," explicitly stating the site's support for the singular pronoun in both queer and generic contexts. Just as popular prescriptivists vehemently oppose using 'they' as a singular pronoun, there are many writers who are in favor of it, such as Stamper (2018), who wrote a popular *Boston Globe* essay about the development of the singular 'they' over time and the importance of its current usage.

Clearly, there is much controversy over using 'they' as a singular pronoun. However, despite the many opinion pieces available online and all of the style guides that address the issue, research on attitudes toward the singular 'they' is very new. While a handful of older studies examined usage and understanding of the singular 'they', (e.g., Foertsch and Gernsbacher, 1990) to my knowledge, the only survey about attitudes toward the singular 'they' that took place more than five years ago was conducted in 1970 by Mittins et al. These researchers asked for participants' opinions about various "controversial" phrases as they would appear in formal or informal speech or writing. One of their survey items inquired about the singular 'they' in a generic context. On average, across formal and informal contexts, they found that only 42% of participants approved of the generic singular 'they' (Mittins et al., 1970).

Approval ratings of the pronoun then, for the most part, went unstudied for decades until, in the last few years, a handful of researchers began to focus on people's reactions to using the singular 'they'. Just three years ago, Ackerman (2017) found that when paired with names of unambiguous genders such as "Jacob" or "Chloe," the singular 'they' was rejected more frequently than when it was paired with a more gender-neutral name like "Taylor." Ackerman (2017) also found that, overall, using 'they' as a singular pronoun for a specific person was rejected more often than not. Bjorkman (2017) also found that the singular 'they' as used for a

specific, known person was often rejected. Considering that 2017 is also the year that saw style guides starting to change their perspectives on the singular 'they', perhaps it makes sense that research published that year still provided evidence of significant rejection of the pronoun.

Even more recently, scholars have done additional work on people's attitudes toward using 'they' as a singular pronoun. One such researcher who has done extensive work on this topic is Conrod (e.g., 2019), who found that younger participants and those who are part of or have been exposed to the LGBTQ+ community are more accepting of the singular 'they', which arguably demonstrates a recent shift in attitudes toward the pronoun. Conrod (2019) also found that, in contrast to Ackerman's (2017) and Bjorkman's (2017) findings, overall, the singular 'they' was accepted more often than it was not. Similarly, Hekanaho (2020) found that the majority of survey participants (69%) accepted the use of 'they' as a singular pronoun for a specific nonbinary person as long as it was used with the verb form the plural 'they' would take (e.g., "Have you met Chris? They work at the local coffee shop," as opposed to, "They works at the local coffee shop."). Further, in Hekanaho's (2020) study, the singular 'they' was more widely approved of than alternative pronouns such as ze and xe (34% and 33% respectively).

Another particularly relevant study by Bradley (2020) examined how attitudes toward the singular 'they' relate to prescriptive grammar ideology. Bradley (2020) found that people who scored high in prescriptivism were less likely to approve of the singular 'they', especially as it was used in a nonbinary queer context. Further, in this study, nonbinary people and people more familiar with the singular 'they' were more likely to rate the singular 'they' as grammatical than others; this evidences the connection between transgender people and attitudes toward using 'they' as a singular pronoun (Bradley, 2020). Additionally, the way that this study links linguistic prescriptivism and attitudes toward using 'they' as a singular pronoun supports the research to be presented in this thesis.

Overall, people want to be respectful of the language preferences of queer people (Green, Denny, & Cromwell, 2018), and using the singular 'they' in a generic context generally goes unnoticed by readers of the English language (Foertsch & Gernsbacher, 1997). 'They' has been used as a singular pronoun for over 600 years, and attempts to force the addition of an alternative gender-

neutral third-person singular pronoun have failed. The trend toward accepting the singular 'they' is clear, and it is not unlikely that in the future, its use will become even more prevalent than it already is.

In sum, these most recent findings seem to indicate an ongoing and recent shift in people's attitudes toward using 'they' as a singular pronoun, as research from just three years ago evidenced more disapproval of the pronoun than findings from the last year. There seems to be more approval of the queer 'they' than the generic 'they', as can be seen through the above research results as well as the previously described style guides' acceptance of using the singular 'they' for nonbinary people above using the pronoun in a generic context.

I believe that the reason for the findings discussed above is likely related to aversive prejudice, as it is possible that people could express their prejudice against nonbinary transgender people by blaming their dislike for the singular 'they' on their prescriptive grammar ideals, when in reality, the problem is that they are biased against nonbinary trans people. In light of the studies discussed so far, we can see that there are still unanswered questions about the reasons for people's dislike of the singular 'they'. In my research study below, with an interest in understanding people's thinking about the singular 'they', I investigate attitudes toward using 'they' as a singular pronoun and how those attitudes are related to prejudice against transgender people and preferences for prescriptivism. In my discussion of my research, I will further argue that this is due in part to aversive prejudice.

THE PRESENT STUDY: RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Clearly, there is much controversy over using 'they' as a singular pronoun. The research studies cited in the previous section demonstrate that there are conflicting results about how likely people are to approve of the singular 'they'. Considering the continuous and current nature of change in language attitudes, especially those related to transgender people, it is likely that even in the last couple of years, attitudes toward the singular 'they' have changed.

Thus, in conducting my study, I posed the research question:

> *RQ1*: What percent of participants approve of the singular 'they'?

Sometimes the singular 'they' issue is viewed differently depending on whether the pronoun appears in a generic context for someone whose gender is unknown or if it is in a specific queer context for someone who prefers 'they' as their pronoun. Little recent research has been done to examine the difference in 'they' attitudes based on context (e.g., Foertsch & Gernsbacher 1997; Conrod, 2019). Since one of the key contexts in which 'they' is used as a singular pronoun is directly related to the transgender community, it is possible that attitudes toward queer people could affect attitudes toward 'they' as a singular pronoun. Indeed, I propose that such opposition to the singular 'they', when used as a gender-neutral pronoun, is due in part to aversive prejudice (Pearson et al., 2009) against transgender nonbinary people. This allows for the expression of bias under the guise of upholding established grammatical standards. Additionally, it would seem that the majority of the people who are opposed to using 'they' are self-proclaimed prescriptive grammarians; thus, prescriptive grammar mentality could play a role in 'they' attitudes (MacKay, 1980).

With all this in mind, I hypothesized that:

> *H1*: Prejudice against transgender individuals will predict negative attitudes
> toward 'they' in a queer context but not in a generic context, whereas a high

prescriptive grammar mentality will predict 'they' attitudes in both generic and queer contexts.

Because transgender nonbinary individuals are considered part of the LGBTQ+ community, it is possible that membership in that community could be related to 'they' attitudes.

Thus, I hypothesized:

> *H2*: Both sexual orientation (straight vs. queer sexual orientations) and gender (cisgender vs. transgender) will moderate the relationship between prescriptive grammar ideology and attitudes toward 'they' in the generic and queer contexts.

It is likely that both age and education level are related to attitudes toward transgender people (e.g., Elischberger et al., 2016), and as mentioned above, I am indeed proposing that 'they' attitudes could be related to attitudes toward transgender individuals. So, it is then possible that those variables could be related to prescriptive grammar ideology.

As such, I hypothesized that:

> *H3*: Age and education level will predict attitudes toward 'they', prejudice against transgender individuals, and prescriptive grammar mentality such that older participants will be less likely to approve of using 'they' as a singular pronoun regardless of context, will be more prejudiced against transgender people, and will be more likely to have high prescriptive grammar ideology; whereas people with higher levels of education will be more likely to approve of 'they' in generic and queer contexts, will be less likely to be prejudiced against transgender individuals, and will be less likely to idealize prescriptive grammar.

And that:

> *H4*: Education level will moderate the relationship between age and 'they' attitudes, prejudice against transgender individuals, and prescriptive grammar mentality; although age will be an independent predictor of less progressive attitudes, a higher education level will lessen this effect.

With these questions and hypotheses in mind, I created and conducted a survey research study examining the topics at hand.

METHODS

Participants

Participants were 499 individuals recruited from electronic mailing lists and 223 people from Amazon's Mechanical Turk worker pool (total $n = 722$). The average age of participants was 35.6 years ($SD = 12.23$, range: 18-80). The majority (92%) of participants were cisgender (412 cis females, 252 cis males). A diverse minority of participants (8%) was comprised of 58 individuals who identified as a gender other than that assigned at birth, including people who were genderqueer, nonbinary, genderfluid, transgender male, transgender female, and other gender identities.[11]

There were 232 participants with a queer sexual orientation (QSO): 58 lesbian or gay (7.2%), 31 asexual or demisexual (4.3%), 130 bisexual or pansexual (18%), and 20 others (e.g., queer, multiple orientations; 2.8%). The remaining 489 participants were heterosexual (67.7%). With regard to education level, the majority of participants had completed one or more college degrees (46.4% held graduate degrees, 34.5% completed a 2 or 4 year degree, 12.2% completed high school and some college, 4.8% graduated high school, 2.2% completed vocational school programs). Only 9.2% of participants were non-native English speakers; 74.2% were native American English speakers, and the remaining 16.6% were native speakers of other Englishes (e.g., Canadian English, British English).

Procedure

Participants recruited via electronic mailing lists were not compensated, while workers from Amazon's Mechanical Turk received $1 for their participation. All participants completed online consent forms and were then given access to an anonymous online survey about attitudes toward 'they' as a singular pronoun, prescriptive grammar mentality, and attitudes toward LGBTQ+ individuals. The survey included various attitude scales as well as demographic and open

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[11] Not all participants who did not identify themselves as cisgender males or females would necessarily classify themselves as transgender. However, for the purposes of data analysis, it was necessary to lump all of these participants into the 'transgender' category. No participants who explicitly said they were *not* transgender were included in the 'transgender' category.

response questions, and as this was part of a larger study, only relevant measures are reported below. In total, this survey included 112 questions, and I estimate that the study took approximately 30 minutes to complete. (See Appendix A for complete survey.)

Measures

Attitudes toward transgender individuals.

To measure this variable, I used the preexisting 20-item Attitudes Toward Transgendered Individuals Scale (Walch et al., 2012). The wording of a few items in this scale was modified slightly to be congruent with modern terminology in the LGBTQ+ community (e.g., using the term *transgender* instead of *transgendered*). Participants reported on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree,* 5 = *strongly agree*) their agreement with statements such as, "Transgender individuals should be accepted completely into our society". Cronbach's alpha (reliability) for this measure was .96.

Prescriptive grammar mentality.

For the purposes of this study, I developed a new Prescriptive Grammar Mentality Scale. Participants rated their approval of statements related to prescriptive grammar on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). This scale included items such as, "Improper grammar is a pet peeve of mine", and Cronbach's alpha for this measure was .93.

Attitudes toward 'they' as a singular pronoun.

Participants completed a 16-item scale to measure their attitudes toward the use of 'they' in a singular context. I designed this scale for the present study, and it included two subscales: generic 'they' attitudes (12 items, Cronbach's alpha = .93) and queer 'they' attitudes (4 items, Cronbach's alpha = .80). An example of an item on the generic 'they' subscale is, "It is acceptable to use 'they' to refer to one person if you are unsure of the person's gender. For example, 'Someone left their phone in the lobby'". The queer 'they' subscale included items such as, "If someone asked me to refer to them using gender-neutral pronouns such as, 'they, them, and, their', I would do my best to use those pronouns when talking about that person".

Open response items.

Participants answered the questions, "Do you have any final comments about the topics covered in this survey, especially about the usage of 'they' to refer to only one person?" and, "Have you ever personally been referred to as 'they'? Please describe how you feel/felt about being referred to as 'they'".

RESULTS

RQ1: Overall approval of the singular 'they'

Prior to delving into my hypotheses, I examined my research question of interest, looking into participants' overall acceptance of using 'they' as a singular pronoun (see Table 1). The majority of participants (61.98%) had a positive response to using 'they' as a singular pronoun in a generic context (8.19% strongly approve, 53.79% approve). A notable group of 22.71% of participants neither approved nor disapproved, and only 15.38% responded negatively to using the generic singular 'they' (5.13% strongly disapprove, 10.25% disapprove). The rate of approval of singular 'they' in both the queer and generic contexts was encouragingly higher than I expected to find. I believe that this could be viewed as evidence that people tend to have more progressive attitudes about grammar once viewed as "incorrect".

Table 1. Overall approval of using 'they' as a singular pronoun in generic and queer contexts.

	Generic Context	Queer Context
Approve		
Strongly approve	8.19%	22.16%
Approve	53.79%	42.38%
Neutral	22.71%	22.71%
Disapprove		
Disapprove	10.25%	8.86%
Strongly disapprove	5.13%	3.88%

Surprisingly, endorsement of using 'they' as a singular pronoun in a queer context was even greater than in the generic context; 64.54% of participants approved (42.38%) or strongly approved (22.16%) of the queer 'they'. The same percentage of people (22.71%) had a neutral opinion on the matter, while a mere 12% disapproved (8.86%) or strongly disapproved (3.88%).

It is noteworthy that extreme positive responses were much more common for 'they' in the queer context than for 'they' in the generic context. It is possible that participants felt obligated to give positive responses toward using 'they' in the queer context because of societal pressure to accept transgender individuals. These extreme positive responses to queer 'they' could also be due in part to the fact that a large minority of the participants in the present study were part of the LGBTQ+ community, and perhaps those participants were passionate supporters of the queer 'they', as its use is an issue that pertains to their own queer community. 'They' in a generic context has no such large community to support it; thus, it has fewer enthusiastic supporters. However, while there were a greater number of QSO participants than straight individuals who went from approving of generic 'they' to strongly approving of queer 'they', the larger group of people who changed their approval to strong approval was those who have very positive attitudes toward transgender individuals. Thus, the most likely explanation for this finding is that acceptance of transgender individuals is a key contributing factor in participants' approval of using 'they' as a singular pronoun in the queer context.

H1: Attitudes toward transgender individuals and prescriptive grammar mentality as predictors of 'they' attitudes

To determine the best predictors of attitudes toward 'they' as a singular pronoun in generic and queer contexts, I conducted a regression analysis. In a queer context, negative attitudes toward 'they' were best predicted by prejudice against transgender people. (See Table 2.) In a generic context, both prescriptive grammar mentality and attitudes toward transgender individuals similarly predict 'they' attitudes. It is important to note that prescriptive grammar ideology does independently predict attitudes toward 'they' as a singular pronoun. However, so do attitudes toward transgender individuals. This would not be the case if negative 'they' attitudes were merely an issue of a principled stance against what prescriptivists see as "improper grammar".

Table 2. Summary of regression analysis for prescriptive grammar attitudes and prejudice against transgender people as variables that predict 'they' attitudes in generic and queer contexts.

Variable	Generic context			Queer context		
	B	*SE B*	*β*	*B*	*SE B*	*β*
Prescriptive Grammar Attitudes	-.325	.035	-.334*	-.142	.035	-.144*
Attitudes Toward Transgender Individuals	-.420	.044	-.337*	-.632	.045	-.498*

*p < .001

H2: Sexual orientation and gender as moderators of the relationship between prescriptive grammar ideology and 'they' attitudes.

I performed four moderation analyses to examine this hypothesis (Hayes, 2013). First, when the context of the singular 'they' was generic, higher levels of prescriptive grammar ideology significantly predicted less acceptance of the singular 'they', and this relationship was moderated by sexual orientation such that for straight people, prescriptive grammar mentality is a stronger predictor of generic 'they' attitudes than it is for QSO people (B = .180, p = .01). I found a similar moderation in my second analysis, which showed that sexual orientation moderates the relationship between prescriptive grammar ideology and attitudes toward 'they' in a queer context (B = .149, p = .05).

In my third moderation analysis, the singular 'they' was again in a generic context, and the relationship between prescriptive grammar ideology and acceptance of the singular 'they' was moderated by gender; a high idealization of prescriptive grammar is a stronger predictor of generic 'they' attitudes in cisgender people than in transgender people (B = .327, p < .05). My fourth analysis examined the relationship between prescriptive grammar mentality and attitudes toward 'they' in a queer context. While gender was not a significant moderator for that

relationship (B = .126, p = .478), the main effect of cisgender individuals' prescriptive grammar mentality on attitudes toward 'they' in a queer context was significant and negative (B = -.304, p < .001). It is descriptively noteworthy that in contrast, for transgender individuals, that relationship was not present (B = -.175, p = .312). I believe that the non-significant result of this fourth moderation is not due to the model being different from the previous three but rather that it is an issue of statistical power due to the relatively small number of transgender participants in my sample. In future research, I will further explore this relationship.

H3: Role of age and education level in predicting 'they' attitudes, prejudice against transgender individuals, and prescriptive grammar mentality.

I performed multiple regression analyses to examine the role of age and education level in prejudice against transgender people as well as in attitudes toward 'they' as a singular pronoun and prescriptive grammar mentality (see Table 3). I found that both age and education level are highly significant independent predictors of attitudes toward 'they' in generic and queer contexts. The older someone was, the less likely they were to approve of using 'they' as a singular pronoun in both queer (B = -.022, p < .000) and generic (B = -.027, p < .000) contexts. Participants' higher education levels strongly predicted approval of 'they' in queer (B = .149, p < .000) and generic (B = .114, p < .000) contexts.

Additionally, older participants were much more likely than younger individuals to be prejudiced against transgender people (B = .012, p < .000) and more likely to have a high prescriptive grammar mentality (B = .017, p < .000). The higher the level of education participants had, the less likely they were to have prejudice against transgender individuals (B = -.240, p < .000) and less likely they were to idealize prescriptive grammar (B = -.286, p < .000). Thus, it is clear that both age and education level play an important role in predicting attitudes toward 'they' as a singular pronoun, prejudice against transgender people, and prescriptive grammar mentality.

Table 3. Summary of regression analysis for age and education level as variables that predict 'they' attitudes in generic and queer contexts, attitudes toward transgender individuals, and prescriptive grammar mentality.

Variable	Prescriptive grammar mentality			Attitudes toward transgender individuals			'They' generic context			'They' queer context		
	B	$SE\ B$	β	B	$SE\ B$	B	B	$SE\ B$	β	B	$SE\ B$	B
Age	.017	.003	.212*	.012	.002	.185*	-.027	.003	-.342*	-.022	.003	-.271*
Education level	-.286	.031	-.337	-.240	.025	-.363*	.114	.029	.140	.149	.030	.181*

*$p < .001$

H4: Education level as a moderator of the relationship between age and 'they' attitudes, prescriptive grammar ideology, and attitudes toward transgender individuals.

I was interested in if there was an interactive effect of education level on the relationship between age and 'they' attitudes, prescriptive grammar ideology, and attitudes toward transgender individuals, so I performed four moderation analyses to explore these relationships (Hayes, 2013). I found that education level moderates the relationship between age and prescriptive grammar ideology (B = -.005, p = .01) as well as between age and attitudes toward transgender people (B = -.006, p < .05). While age continues to be a significant independent predictor of both factors, the higher a participant's education level, the weaker the relationship between age and attitudes toward transgender people and between age and prescriptive grammar ideology. When education level is low, the relationship between age and attitudes toward transgender individuals is strong (B = .018, p < .000); when education level is medium, the relationship is weaker (B = .012, p < .000); and when education level is high, the relationship is still significant, but is much weaker (B = .007, p = .013). I found essentially the same thing for attitudes toward prescriptive grammar: with a low level of education, there is a strong effect of age on prescriptive grammar mentality (B = .018, p < .000); with a medium education level, the effect is weaker (B = .012, p < .000); and with a high level of education, the effect is still present but significantly weaker (B = .007, p = .013). These findings align with the results of the above regression analyses.

Thus, education level does significantly moderate the relationships between age and prescriptive grammar mentality and attitudes toward transgender individuals. The older someone is, the less likely they are to accept transgender people and the more likely they are to idealize prescriptive grammar, but education level softens these effects.

A complication in my analyses presented itself when I performed moderation analyses looking at education level as a moderator of the relationship between age and attitudes toward the generic and queer 'they'. In these analyses, education level was not a significant moderator in either the generic context (B = -.0003, p = .889) or the queer context (B = .003, p = .159).

Although I was initially surprised by these results, I considered three potential explanations for these findings. First, I explored the idea that perhaps 'they' attitudes could be an indirect measure of subtle prejudice against transgender individuals (for queer 'they') and prescriptive grammar mentality (for generic 'they'). Perhaps older, more highly educated people are aware of the importance of avoiding overt prejudices; thus, the impact of education level on the relationship between age and prescriptive grammar mentality and attitudes toward transgender individuals is indeed significant. It is conceivable, then, that those older, more educated individuals might be less aware of their implicit prejudices, which could explain my finding that education level does not have a significant effect on the relationship between age and 'they' attitudes in both queer and generic contexts.

Second, I considered that these findings could be accounted for by participants' lack of familiarity with the singular 'they', frequency issues with how often they have encountered it, and personal difficulty with using it. This idea was brought about by reading the open response items gathered in my survey, in which some participants commented that they support transgender individuals and oppose prescriptive grammar, but that actually using the singular 'they' is extremely difficult for them, partially because of how infrequently they encounter individuals who prefer the singular 'they' as their pronoun. An example of such a response is, "It's been quite difficult to switch to 'they' when people request that I use that pronoun to refer to them. I found it much easier this summer, for instance, when I met a totally new person who wanted the pronoun 'they'. That wasn't so difficult. But I [have] had to switch from 'she' to 'they' for someone I've known for more than 10 years, and that has been a challenge for me". Third, it could, of course, be a combination of the first two potential explanations mentioned above. This matter is being further explored in my ongoing research.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this study, the majority of participants approved of using 'they' as a singular pronoun, and even more people approved of it in the queer context than in the generic context. This finding aligns with the most recent research on acceptance of the singular 'they', such as that performed by Hekanaho (2020). Judgments of using the singular 'they' appear to be influenced by prescriptive grammar mentality, by attitudes toward transgender people, and by whether 'they' appears in a generic or queer context. Again, this lines up with very recent previous research conducted by Bradley (2020). Both sexual orientation (straight vs. queer sexual orientations) and gender (cisgender vs. transgender) moderate the relationship between prescriptive grammar ideology and attitudes toward 'they' in the generic and queer contexts. To my knowledge, mine is the first study to examine moderation effects such as these. These results fit in with and extend prior researchers' findings.

Age and education level predict both subtle (disliking 'they' as a singular pronoun in queer contexts) and overt (attitudes toward transgender individuals) forms of prejudice against transgender people. Older people are more likely to be closed-minded about using 'they' as a singular pronoun regardless of context and more likely to have overt prejudice against transgender individuals; this finding replicates what Conrod (2019) found in their research. The same pattern appears for attitudes toward prescriptive grammar mentality. A higher age predicts higher prescriptivism, and advanced education level predicts less prescriptive grammar ideology. That said, for older participants, having a higher education level softens the effect of age on attitudes toward trans people.

I believe that these findings provide evidence that measuring attitudes toward using 'they' as a singular pronoun could be one way to examine subtle, implicit prejudice against transgender people. This could support the idea that aversive prejudice theory applies to attitudes toward trans people such that some people blame their disapproval of the singular 'they' on their principled stance on prescriptive grammar, when in reality, the problem is that they are prejudiced against nonbinary transgender individuals. In cases such as this, people could still express explicit support for trans people, but their rejection of the using 'they' as a singular

60

pronoun could indicate that they have nonconscious biases against them. These findings have implications for theories of prejudice, particularly with regard to the increasingly important area of attitudes toward people with diverse gender identities.

If my assessment is correct, it is quite possible that implicit biases such as these could have a strong impact on the relationships cisgender people have with trans individuals. This would be similar to how interactions between other marginalized individuals and less marginalized people are impacted by implicit bias (e.g., Dovidio et al., 2002; Nadler et al., 2014). Thus, these findings also have implications for transgender individuals' relationships with cisgender and heterosexual people. Furthering society's understanding of the topics at hand could improve transgender people's interactions with cisgender individuals, which in turn, could positively impact the wellbeing of trans people. This suggestion is supported by research by Hoffarth and Hodson (2018) as well as the theories presented by Zimman (2017) which suggest that the language used to refer to trans people is an important factor in the acceptance and support of trans individuals. This study sits within our understanding of transgender history. As discussed above, transgender people have long struggled to be accepted by society. While presently, politicians, trans-exclusionists, and conservatives are trying to diminish the rights and acceptance of trans people, they have failed to halt the slow but increasing societal support of trans individuals. In recent years, this progress has begun to provide hope for trans people and our supporters who strive to continue the "fight-back movement" for our acceptance and understanding, as Leslie Feinberg put it. My research provides hope that people's explicit biases against trans individuals and the pronouns they use are decreasing and are mitigated by factors like age, education, and familiarity with trans people. While it is clear that implicit prejudice is still an issue, future researchers can work to find ways to lessen the effects of those prejudices.

While this review of literature and research study provided important insight into the topics at hand, my study had a number of limitations. With regard to my sample of participants, while I had a good number of responses (n = 722), the sample was skewed toward including people with higher levels of education than is representative of the general population. Since my sample was so large, I still had an acceptable number of less highly educated participants, but the skew could still have impacted my results. Also, it would have been ideal to have had a greater number of

transgender participants, as their attitudes are important in measuring the issues at hand. Conversely, the number of participants who expressed significant explicit prejudice against trans people was quite low and potentially not representative of the general population. Those more negatively biased people are important to include in studies such as mine as well.

As for study design and analysis, the scale I created for measuring attitudes toward the singular 'they' could be improved by including more items about the queer 'they' and fewer items about the generic 'they'. Additionally, the scale I used to measure prejudice against transgender people (Walch et al., 2012) addresses general anti-trans biases and does not explicitly address attitudes toward nonbinary people. It would be ideal to develop measures that look more directly at both implicit and explicit attitudes toward binary and nonbinary trans people because while these categories overlap, they are, in part, distinct from each other. This would help in further analyzing how attitudes toward 'they' as a singular pronoun could be an indication of implicit and explicit attitudes about trans people.

Also, unlike prior research (e.g., Ackerman, 2017), my study only examined attitudes toward the singular 'they' and did not address the use of the pronoun. While using an attitude scale is a relatively unique, novel, and important way of addressing the topics at hand, measuring both usage of and attitudes toward the pronoun would give a more well-rounded understanding of the 'they' attitudes. Another issue is that the comparisons drawn between the generic 'they' and the queer 'they' could be problematic because societal attitudes toward the two contexts of the pronoun are differently motivated — the generic 'they' is more related to prescriptivism, while the queer 'they' is more related to trans people. Finally, while analyzing my results, it became apparent that conservatism could be an influential factor in attitudes toward trans people, the singular 'they', and prescriptive grammar mentality, so it is unfortunate that I did not include that measure in my study.

These limitations should be addressed in future studies. Researchers should include participants more representative of the general population as well as more transgender individuals. Scales for measuring attitudes toward the singular 'they' should be improved, and future studies should examine both usage of and attitudes toward using 'they' as a singular pronoun simultaneously. It

is crucial that future researchers investigate the role of political orientation in research like mine, as I believe that conservatism could be a partial explanation for these results since older and less educated people tend to be more conservative, while younger and more highly educated people tend to be more liberal. Additionally, future studies that use methods that include measuring implicit biases against transgender individuals could aid in a further understanding of how aversive prejudice against trans people is related to 'they' attitudes. Future research that incorporates these suggestions will facilitate working toward the ultimate, necessary goal of improving our societal understanding of how prescriptivism and attitudes toward the singular 'they' impact prejudice against nonbinary transgender people.

APPENDIX A. SURVEY ITEMS USED IN THE PRESENT STUDY

BLOCK 1: INFORMATION SHEET

Grammar Attitudes and Individual Factors

Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne

<u>What is the purpose of this study?</u>

In this study, we are interested in learning about what people's attitudes toward using "they" to refer to one person and what factors are related to those attitudes.

<u>What will I do if I choose to be in this study?</u>

If you choose to participate, you will complete an online survey answering questions about your attitudes towards using "they" to refer to only one person, your attitudes toward grammar in general, and your attitudes toward various people groups.

<u>How long will I be in the study?</u>

The study should take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete.

<u>What are the possible risks or discomforts?</u>

Risks are minimal no greater than everyday life. A breach of confidentiality is a potential risk of participation; however, steps to minimize this risk are listed in the confidentiality section. We will not collect your IP address or ask for any personal identification information.

<u>Are there any potential benefits?</u>

Although this research has no direct benefits for you, you may find some of the survey questions intriguing. The key benefit of this survey is that it will add to researchers' understanding of attitudes about grammar and various individual factors that influence those factors.

<u>Will I receive payment or other incentive?</u>

No. This survey is entirely voluntary, and you will receive no compensation for taking it - other than knowing you helped the researchers.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?

All of the information is for research purposes only. Participants' names will not be collected on the survey. No other personal identifiers, such as IP addresses, will be collected. All research records will be held indefinitely; we have no plans to destroy the data at this time. Archived data that is not included in a primary analysis may be used in future for study design or reanalysis.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or, if you agree to participate, you can withdraw your participation at any time.

Who can I contact if I have questions about the study?

If you have questions, comments, or concerns about this research project, you can contact the researchers via PI Dr. Shannon Bischoff at bischofs@ipfw.edu or Elisa (Elli) Hernandez by emailing hernee01@students.ipfw.edu.

Documentation of Informed Consent

CLICK BELOW TO INDICATE THAT YOU HAVE READ THIS CONSENT FORM, THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS, AND THAT YOU ARE PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT.

1. I have read this Information Sheet, I agree, I am 18 years old or older, and I would like to continue this survey.
2. I disagree and wish to exit this survey.

BLOCK 2: DEMOGRAPHICS

1. What is your age? (Please enter numbers only.)
2. Which of the following best describes your gender identity?
   a. Female
   b. Male
   c. Non-binary (genderqueer, genderfluid, neutrois, etc.)
   d. Transgender male (FTM, transmasculine, etc.)

e. Transgender female (MTF, transfeminine, etc.)

f. Other (Please specify.)

3. What is your sexual orientation? (Please choose the option that fits best.)

a. Lesbian or gay

b. Asexual or demisexual

c. Straight

d. Bisexual or pansexual

e. Other (please specify.)

4. Do you identify with any of the following racial/ethnic groups? (Check all that apply.)

a. African American

b. Asian

c. Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

d. Hispanic/LatinX

e. Native American/Alaska Native

f. White/Caucasian

g. Other (Please specify.)

5. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

a. Middle school

b. High school

c. High school plus some college

d. Vocational school

e. College (finished 2 or 4 year degree)

f. Graduate school

6. Are you currently taking and/or teaching any type of academic course?

a. Yes

b. No

7. How many linguistics courses have you taken?

a. 0

b. 1

c. 2

d. 3+

8. Are you a native English speaker?

   a. Yes

   b. No

9. What is your native language?

10. I am a native speaker of _____ English.

   a. American

   b. Australian

   c. Belizean

   d. British

   e. Canadian

   f. Hong Kong

   g. Indian

   h. Irish

   i. New Zealand

   j. Nigerian

   k. Singaporean

   l. Other

BLOCK 3: ATTITUDES TOWARD 'THEY' AS A SINGULAR PRONOUN

Please rate the following statements based on how much you agree with them. *(Rated on a Likert scale. 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Somewhat disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Somewhat agree, 5 = Strongly agree)*

1. It is acceptable to use 'they' to refer to one person if you are unsure of the person's gender. For example, Someone left their phone in the lobby.

2. It is acceptable to use 'they' to refer to one person if the person's gender is irrelevant to the conversation. For example, "My friend told me they're going to a concert tonight!"

3. It is NOT generally acceptable to use 'they' to refer to a single person.

4. It is generally acceptable to use 'they' to refer to a single person.

5. It can be grammatically correct to refer to a singular person with pronouns such as, 'they', 'them', and, 'their'.

6. If you are talking about someone whose gender is irrelevant, you should still refer to that person as he or she. For example, "My friend told me he's going to a concert tonight!"

7. It is NOT grammatically correct to refer to a singular person with pronouns such as, 'they', 'them', and, 'their'.

8. If you are talking about someone whose gender is unknown, you should refer to that person as 'he', or, 'he or she'. For example, "Someone left [his][his or her] phone in the lobby."

9. I use 'they' to refer to a single person if that person's gender is irrelevant.

10. I use 'they' to refer to a single person if that person's gender is unknown.

11. If someone asked me to refer to them using gender-neutral pronouns such as, 'they', 'them', and, 'their', I would do my best to use those pronouns when talking about that person.

12. I do NOT use 'they' to refer to a single person even if that person's gender is irrelevant.

13. I do NOT use 'they' to refer to a single person even if that person's gender is unknown.

14. If someone asked me to refer to them using gender-neutral pronouns such as, 'they', 'them', and, 'their', I doubt I would use those pronouns when talking about that person.

15. If I am unsure of someone's gender identity (perhaps if I think they might be genderqueer or transgender), I refer to that person using gender-neutral pronouns such as, 'they', 'them', and 'their'.

16. If I am unsure of someone's gender identity (perhaps if I think they might be genderqueer or transgender), I refer to that person using pronouns associated with the biological sex I suspect them to be, such as, 'she', 'her', and 'hers'.

BLOCK 4: PRESCRIPTIVE GRAMMAR ATTITUDES

Please rate the following statements based on how much you agree with them. *(Rated on a Likert scale. 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Somewhat disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Somewhat agree, 5 = Strongly agree)*

1. It really bothers me when people use words like, 'their', 'there', and, 'they're', improperly.

2. There are certain standard rules of grammar that must be followed.

3. I hate when people use bad grammar.

4. There is a correct way of writing, and more people should follow it.

5. There is a correct way of speaking, and more people should follow it.

6. It's really NOT that hard to use words like, 'its' and, 'it's' correctly. Everyone should do it.

7. People all use language in their own way, and that's totally okay, even if their own way isn't considered standard.

8. People's use of proper language is declining.

9. Improper grammar is a pet peeve of mine.

10. Attention check: It is possible to walk from New York to London in one hour.

11. It would be good if people could accept that language changes, and standard grammar changes along with it.

12. Advances in technology have influenced people to use worse grammar.

13. I wish educators wouldn't lower their standards about grammar.

14. I correct other people's grammar when it's wrong, even when they don't ask me to.

15. If I saw a sign that said something like, "TOMATOE'S ON SALE", it would bother me.

16. I always make an effort to use proper grammar.

BLOCK 5: TRANSITION NOTE

In light of the global discourse regarding gender identity and pronoun usage in English, in the next section we will be asking questions regarding attitudes about gender and sexuality.

BLOCK 6: ATTITUDES TOWARD LESBIANS AND GAY MEN SCALE – SHORT FORM (Herek, 1994)

Please rate the following items based on how much you agree with them. *(Rated on a Likert scale [1 = Disagree strongly, 2 = Disagree somewhat, 3 = Agree somewhat, 4 = Agree strongly].)*

1. I think male homosexuals are disgusting.

2. Male homosexuality is a perversion.

3. Male homosexuality is a natural expression of sexuality in men.

4. Sex between two men is just plain wrong.

5. Male homosexuality is merely a different kind of lifestyle that should NOT be condemned.

6. Lesbians just can't fit into our society.

7. State laws against private sexual behavior between consenting adult women should be abolished.

8. Female homosexuality is a sin.

9. Female homosexuality in itself is no problem unless society makes it a problem.

10. Lesbians are sick.

BLOCK 7: ATTITUDES TOWARD TRANSGENDERED INDIVIDUALS SCALE (Adapted from Walch et al., 2012)

This questionnaire is designed to measure the way you feel about working or associating with transgender individuals. It is not a test, so there are no right or wrong answers. Answer each item as carefully and accurately as you can. *(Rated on a Likert scale [1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree].)*

1. It would be beneficial to society to recognize transgenderism as normal.
2. Transgender individuals should NOT be allowed to work with children.
3. Transgenderism is immoral.
4. All transgender bars should be closed down.
5. Transgender individuals are a viable part of our society.
6. Transgenderism is a sin.
7. Transgenderism endangers the institution of the family.
8. Transgender individuals should be accepted completely into our society.
9. Transgender individuals should be barred from the teaching profession.
10. There should be no restrictions on transgenderism.
11. I avoid transgender individuals whenever possible.
12. I would feel comfortable working closely with a transgender individual.
13. I would enjoy attending social functions at which transgender individuals were present.
14. I would feel comfortable if I learned that my neighbor was a transgender individual.
15. Transgender individuals should NOT be allowed to cross dress in public.
16. I would like to have friends who are transgender individuals.
17. I would feel comfortable if I learned that my best friend was a transgender individual.

BLOCK 8: OPEN RESPONSE ITEM

Do you have any final comments about the topics covered in this survey, especially about the usage of "they" to refer to only one person?

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