The Cost of Being Trans: Administrative Burden, Citizen-State Interaction, and Transgender People in the US

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Abstract

The Cost of Being Trans: Three Papers on Administrative Burden, Citizen-State Interaction, and Transgender People in the US

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This dissertation explores how transgender people in the US experience administrative burdens. Across three chapters, I explore the learning, compliance, and psychological costs that trans and gender-expansive people face when applying for safety net programs, interrogating how policymakers often use norms to create burdens, which in turn create and reify norms further. I also look at how trans and gender-expansive people cope interacting with government workers, asking, when do burdens become sources of violence? Employing a mixed-method approach, I first survey 465 transgender adults residing in the US who considered applying or applied to SNAP, Medicaid, and/or Unemployment Insurance. I then interview a subset of 43 survey participants to better understand their experiences of administrative burdens during citizen-state interactions. Taken together, this mixed-method dissertation offers one of the first in-depth studies of transgender Americans' experiences of administrative burden. The first goal of this dissertation is to build a foundation for the field of public administration to better understand what gender is and how it functions. Ultimately, my aim for this dissertation is that it inspires future administrative burden and

public administration scholars to understand that gender is not only an independent variable, but also an ever-changing label that can determine who is counted, who is deserving, and who is pushed to the margins.

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Introduction

On February 25th, 2025, transgender actress and model Hunter Schafer uploaded a video to TikTok. The *Euphoria* star took to social media to share that she had just received a new passport after her original one was stolen on a trip to Barcelona. The problem, however, was that while her stolen passport and her emergency temporary replacement had her gender listened as "F," the new one said "M" (Schafer 2025). The result of President Trump's "Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government," Schafer, like thousands of other transgender Americans, was caught in a web of policies and administrative burdens, together producing "policymaking by other means." Her case demonstrates how even when trans individuals overcome costs, as she did by applying for a new passport, they still face hurdles to legitimizing their identity in the eyes of the state.

Most succinctly, this dissertation is about administrative burdens and trans people in the US. Across three chapters, I explore the learning, compliance, and psychological costs that trans and gender-expansive people face when applying for safety net programs, interrogating how policymakers often use norms to create burdens, which in turn create and reify norms further. I also look at how trans and gender-expansive people cope with having to interact with government workers, and ask, when do burdens become a source of violence?

This introduction presents the nuances of both administrative burdens and the label of "transgender" in an American context. I begin this chapter with an overview of administrative burden, providing background on how the field of public administration has defined the concept over the last decade. I then provide a short background on transgender people in the US along with a glossary of terms that are used throughout this dissertation. I finally conclude this chapter with a discussion of the chapters to come.

What is Administrative Burden?

Administrative burdens impact the daily lives of millions of people. Defined broadly as the costs associated with interacting with the state, they represent the learning, compliance, and psychological costs experienced when applying for and receiving services. Burdens not only impact whether people receive services; they also influence whether policies succeed (Moynihan, Herd, and Harvey 2015), how people perceive government (Mettler 2002), and longer-range outcomes such as civic participation and health (Halling and Baekgaard 2023). For some, the costs are simply a nuisance of interacting with the state—waiting in line, filling out annoying paperwork, and learning what documentation they need in order to gain access. But for others, they are formidable hurdles and lead to continual denial of services, stress, and stigma. Studies have demonstrated how burdens have an outsized impact on low income people and People of Color (Johnson and Kroll 2020; Chudnovsky and Peeters 2020), decrease reception of means-tested services such as SNAP and TANF (Bartlett, Burstein, and Hamilton 2004), and increase distrust in the state (Mettler and Soss 2004).

The earliest introduction of administrative burden comes from Burden et. al. (Burden et al. 2012), defined as, "an individual's experience of policy implementation as onerous." However, this initial definition focuses on bureaucrats' perceptions, rather than clients' (Masood and Nisar 2021a). Moynihan, Herd and Harvey (2015) expanded the definition, conceptualizing it as, "a function of learning, psychological, and compliance costs that citizens experience in their interactions with government" (43). Learning costs are burdens that an individual experiences while discerning what is needed to apply for or receive a service. This can include reading about eligibility, necessary documentation, or about what types of benefits a program provides, or figuring out how to get to a service's offices. Compliance costs are the burdens associated with following program rules and procedures. Taking time out of one's day to fill out an application, paying to have documents

notarized, or providing evidence of program eligibility are all examples of compliance costs. Psychological costs, which are arguably the most individualized and thus the hardest to measure, include the stigma of applying for a program that is viewed negatively by the public, the loss of autonomy when interacting with the state, or the stress that results from having to jump through administrative hoops to prove eligibility and enroll (Moynihan, Herd, and Harvey 2015; Herd and Moynihan 2018; Lasky-Fink and Linos 2023).

Burdens are often utilized to control access and outcomes through banal administrative measures as a form of "politics by other means" (Herd and Moynihan 2018). They also arise from administrative errors, bureaucratic bias, and bad policymaking (Peeters 2020). Each type of cost can drastically impact how an individual seeks or attempts to seek services. For example, previous research has shown how high learning costs impact program take-up rates, such as the Earned-Income Tax Credit (Bhargava and Manoli 2015); college attendance among low-income students (Hoxby and Turner 2015); and SNAP and WIC participation during COVID-19 (Barnes and Riel 2022). Psychological costs, such as program stigma, can also have drastic impacts on participation. Bartlett, Burstein, and Hamilton (2004), found 27% of SNAP-eligible individuals said they would not apply because they did not want to be seen as accepting handouts. Burdens can also be interchangeable. For example, Masood and Nisar (2021) found that women doctors applying for maternity leave in Pakistan were willing to increase one type of compliance cost (in the form of paying off a low-level clerk to file paperwork for them) to decrease others (time spent filing paperwork and processing wait times).

Across these costs, administrative burden falls under three themes— they are consequential, distributive, and constructed (Herd and Moynihan 2018). They are consequential in that they impact our lives to varying degrees. Some impacts are relatively small, such as taking time to apply for a library card online (a compliance cost), while others quite large, such as discerning the correct

paperwork to file in order start a business (a learning cost). Regardless of size, all burdens affect what type of access individuals are granted. Burdens are distributive in that some groups face a larger number and more severe burdens. This uneven distribution reinforces and perpetuates inequalities between groups. For example, low-income people face greater burdens when trying to access means-tested programs than people seeking to access a universal program (Soss 1999). Finally, burdens are constructed; they are the result of deliberate choices of policymakers, some of which are targeted and purposeful, and others that are the unintended consequences of related decisions and policies (Herd and Moynihan 2018; Peeters 2020).

The administrative burden framework starts with the assumption that any encounter between a person and the state will generate some type of burden. However, outsized burdens can significantly affect whether individuals access services which they are entitled to, dissuade participation in services, and lead to distrust in government (Christensen et al. 2020; Herd and Moynihan 2018; C. J. Heinrich 2018; Mettler 2002). This is especially problematic when individuals who qualify for programs think they aren't eligible or who find the hurdles to applying too onerous, and thus do not sign up (Herd 2015). When this occurs, people for whom these programs target fail to receive the services that they are entitled to, impacting the success of the program. Communities who lack resources are usually most affected by administrative burdens; burdens becomes a normalized part of life and are even expected for low income communities, communities of color and disabled communities (Johnson and Kroll 2020; Herd and Moynihan 2018), who are already over-surveilled by police and social service caseworkers (Spade 2010; Nisar and Masood 2019). Equally troubling, previous research has demonstrated increasing burdens can also increase public support for certain government programs (e.g., Nicholson-Crotty, Miller, and Keiser 2021). This normalizes the idea program applicants deserve having to navigate onerous processes to receive help.

Types of Costs

Learning Costs

The effects of learning costs on program take-up have been documented in multiple policy subfields, such as education and social policy, and through different approaches (Herd and Moynihan 2018). One of the most common approaches is to document lack of knowledge by target populations, such as low-income students, and demonstrate the effects of increasing said knowledge. For example, in a randomized control trial, Hoxby and Turner (2015) demonstrated that providing high-ability low-income students with information about the college admissions process and financial aid ultimately increased the likelihood of students applying to, being admitted at, and enrolling in more selective colleges than without the supplied information. This is especially important given that pre-intervention, these high-ability students were more likely to apply to and attend less selective colleges and to pay more for attendance, since the less selective colleges had less generous financial aid packages. Multiple studies have also demonstrated that the number of people who are unaware of their eligibility for social programs can be quite significant; Bhargava and Manoli (2015) found that 43% of individuals eligible for the EITC were unaware of the program itself and 33% incorrectly believed that they were not eligible. Bartlett, Burstein, and Hamilton (2004) found that 69% of surveyed nonparticipants of SNAP would participate if they knew for certain that they were eligible.

Learning costs also help to explain why individuals who participate in at least one type of program are more likely to participate in others (Currie and Gruber 1996). Applying to or being enrolled in one program often generates knowledge about others. In some instances, this occurs when an individual researches their eligibility for one program (e.g. SNAP) and discovers they are eligible for another (e.g. Medicaid). This can also occur when programs deliver information, application assistance, or direct enrollment for other programs that participants are eligible for. In

Chapter 1, for example, multiple interview participants discussed how when they applied for either SNAP or Medicaid, they were immediately enrolled in the other because in their state eligibility for one automatically meant eligibility for the other.

Third-party application assistance can reduce learning costs and increase uptake. For instance, tax preparation sites for low-income people in Seattle offer information about enrolling in no-cost savings accounts (United Way of King County 2021). Bettinger et al. (2012) demonstrate that when parents of high school students received outside assistance filling out the Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA), their children were 8% more likely to attend and complete two years of college, compared to the control group. Schanzenbach (2009) found that Medicaid-eligible applicants in California who received third-party assistance when filling out application forms were 80% more likely to complete and submit their applications, compared to those who were eligible but give no special experience.

Compliance Costs

Of the three types of costs, compliance costs have the most empirical support (Moynihan, Herd, and Harvey 2015). Multiple studies have demonstrated that increasing documentation requirements decreases participation (Brien and Swann 2001; Brodkin and Majmundar 2010), as do other compliance requirements such as requiring applicants to partake in face-to-face interviews (Wolfe and Scrivner 2005), or to return after a waiting period before they can access a service (Herd and Moynihan 2018). Monetary cost can also lead to decreased participation; the 2015 US Transgender Survey found that 35% of respondents who had not attempted to obtain correct government-issued identity documents said it was due to cost (James et al. 2016a).

The volume of paperwork involved in applying for a service can also have significant impact on whether people apply or remain enrolled in a program. Surveys of nonparticipants of SNAP found that 40% listed the paperwork required as a reason for not applying (Bartlett, Burstein, and

Hamilton 2004), and Bennet (1995) shows that more than 25% of welfare case closures in her sample were due to issues with claimant documentation. The opposite is also true; a reduction in paperwork can increase sustained program participation. When New York City mayor Eric Adams eliminated the "six month letter," that required SNAP participants to certify that their financial situation had not changed after the first six months of participation, the number of participants who remained enrolled to the one-year mark increased (Russo 2024).

Compliance costs will always exist if a program is not universal; if only certain groups of individuals are eligible, there must be a way to determine who can receive benefits and who cannot. However, the compliance costs of many social programs have risen, often in the name of decreasing fraud, waste and abuse (Jenkins and Nguyen 2021). Efforts to decrease compliance costs, whether in terms of time or money spent, documentation needed, or reporting frequencies, have all been demonstrated to increase take-up and participation in services. Like New York City, states that extended SNAP recertification of eligibility from six months to a year saw an increase in claimants (Leininger et al. 2011), as did the implementation of electronic applications for the EITC (Kopczuk and Pop-Eleches 2007; Schwabish 2012). Schanzenbach's (2009) study of third-party aid in application completion (mentioned above) also demonstrates that decreasing compliance costs (in this case of time spent applying to multiple programs) also aids in successful program enrollment, thus demonstrating that one intervention can decrease multiple types of burdens.

Psychological Costs

While there is less empirical research on the psychological impacts of interacting with the state when securing benefits, various disciplines over the last half a century have demonstrated that psychological costs emerge when people interact with the state. Economics literature has documented the stigma of participating in unpopular programs (Moffitt 1983); political science and sociology provide explanations as to why certain social safety-net programs are unpopular (Horan

and Austin 1974) and participants of certain programs are seen as "undeserving" (Piven and Cloward 1993). From these early studies, we see that psychological costs can often be grouped into feelings of stigma, subservience, and loss of autonomy at the hands of the state.

Stigma

Goffman, in his groundbreaking work of the same name defines stigma as, "an attribute which is deeply discrediting" (Goffman 1963). In a US context, the stigma associated with participating in unpopular social programs casts participants as social deviants, who are lazy and lack ambition (Rainwater 1982; Soss 2000), do not have the autonomy to make their own financial decisions, and are responsible for their own impoverishment (Stuber and Schlesinger 2006). This stigma can both be internalized (identity stigma), or it can affect how participants are treated by external actors, such as bureaucrats, friends, or family (treatment stigma). Identity stigma can lead to a negative internal sense of self, although this is not a guaranteed outcome. Additionally, treatment stigma can be anticipated, rather than directly experienced; an individual may decide not to apply for a program because they believe they will be subjected to behavior such as invasive personal questions, which may or may not actually be true.

Either type of stigma can impact program participation (Stuber and Schlesinger 2006; Bartlett, Burstein, and Hamilton 2004; Johnson and Kroll 2020; Baekgaard, Moynihan, and Thomsen 2020), and a single individual may experience stigma differently each time they interact with the state. For example, a single father visiting a probation office may not feel negatively about being a single father (individual stigma) until his probation officer refuses to see him for his check in while he has his child in tow (treatment stigma). Both types of stigma, but particularly treatment stigma, can increase feelings of subservience and loss of autonomy in the hands of the state.

Subservience and Loss of Autonomy

Interactions with the state can often lead to feelings of powerlessness, particularly for those attempting to access benefits. Receipt of benefits are conditioned on passing criteria where individuals must prove they meet definitions of eligibility, and often feel that they must conform to what they perceive as the image of an appropriate client (Lipsky 1980/2010). When programs have requirements or bureaucrats act in ways that are degrading or intrusive, it violates the human need for self-determination (Deci and Ryan 1985). Drug tests, finger-printing and invasion questions about irrelevant topics such as sexual behavior are all processes traditionally reserved for those who have been charged with lawbreaking, furthering both the stigma of participation as well as the loss of the sense of procedural justice (Herd and Moynihan 2018).

Multiple studies have found that bureaucrats and program administrators' behavior can have a demonstrable impact on whether an individual feels empowered or degraded when interacting with the state (Schram et al. 2009; Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003). The behavior of bureaucrats can be subjective or contradictory (Lipsky 1980/2010), and can increase administrative burden (Herd and Moynihan 2018), administrative exclusion (Brodkin and Majmundar 2010), and selective policing (Epp, Maynard-Moody, and Haider-Markel 2014). As a result, an individual applicant may simply give up when the feelings helplessness and subservience outweigh the perceived benefits from program participation.

Of the three types of costs—learning, compliance, and psychological— psychological costs are arguably the hardest to measure, and have less empirically strong evidence than learning and compliance costs (Moynihan, Herd, and Harvey 2015). All administrative burdens are deeply personal, but psychological costs are perhaps the most so. While compliance costs can be directly measured in minutes or dollars spent on an application, or indirectly as opportunity costs, feelings of being stigmatized or discriminated against do not have tangible units of measure. Additionally, the

distributive nature of burdens (discussed in depth in the next section) mean that the psychological impact of said stigma can be vastly different person to person. For example, what is the level of stigma of being HIV-positive versus that of an unwed mother? Both statuses are viewed negatively, but to the degree that either has a demonstrable impact on how an individual interacts with the State relies on many intersecting factors and identities, including race, age, gender identity, and socioeconomic status.

Studying the three types of administrative burden costs is also empirically difficult because costs do not occur in a vacuum. Increasing or decreasing one type of cost may increase or decrease another. Multiple studies have demonstrated how compliance costs can begin to feel insurmountable, becoming a psychological cost as well (e.g., Adams, Snyder, and Sandfort 2002; Crosby, Gennetian, and Huston 2005; Scott, London, and Hurst 2005; Shlay et al. 2002). As previously discussed, removing one type of cost (for example, a learning cost by providing third-party assistance) can decrease time spent on an application (a compliance cost) but also may decrease psychological costs when applicants are given autonomy over their application decisions.

Themes of Burdens

In addition to categorizing burdens into the three types of costs described in detail in the previous section, burdens can be described by three overarching themes. These themes—that burdens are consequential, distributive, and constructed—explain why burdens can have such a large impact on people's lives, why they disparately affect different populations, and how they can be used to control behavior. Regardless of the type of cost (learning, compliance or psychological), all administrative burdens are consequential, distributive, and constructed.

Burdens are Consequential

Burdens have impacts; they impact people's lives in a myriad of ways, from minor inconveniences to debilitating costs (Herd and Moynihan 2018). Burdens can impact everything from who gets a library card (Braun 2013), to go who goes to college (Hoxby and Turner 2015), to who is given citizenship status (Fix, Passel, and Sucher 2003). Oftentimes, these burdens are justified as eligibility criteria— to receive financial aid, you must fill out the FAFSA and demonstrate financial need; to apply for citizenship status you must reside continuously in the US for ten years, learn English, and go through a series of background checks. Failure to overcome any of these burdens can mean individuals may be forced delay enrollment in a program or may give up applying altogether. Studies have also demonstrated that often there can be "cascades of consequences" or "cascades of exclusions" (Peeters 2020, 569), where an initial exclusion (e.g., due to nonacceptance of an application) leads to more denials and exclusions because services are linked together either by information architecture (Widlak and Peeters 2020) or identification requirements (Heinrich 2018). Previous negative experiences and interactions with government can affect a person's willingness or ability to participate, or trust in the state (Bruch, Marx-Freere, and Soss 2010; Mettler 2002). In their most extreme, burdens can determine who is and is not considered a member of society by the state (Herd and Moynihan 2018; Nisar 2018). In the US, immigration law and the burdens associated with becoming a citizen can be so onerous that research shows that nearly half of eligible applicants do not apply (Gonzalez-Barrera et al. 2013). Oftentimes, these burdens are created purposely to deter participation (Herd and Moynihan 2018).

Burdens are Distributive

Burdens impact different people differently; multiple studies have shown that people who are less advantaged will be impacted more by burdens (Peeters 2020; Christensen et al. 2020). The

distributive nature of burdens mean that they can reinforce inequalities that already exist (Ray, Herd, and Moynihan 2023). One way is through program requirements. Since targeted programs will have more burdens than universal ones (e.g. the compliance costs of proving eligibility, learning costs associated with navigating an application, or psychological costs of stigma associated with participation), those who participate in means-tested programs experience greater burdens (Herd and Moynihan 2018). While Medicare and Social Security, two universal programs, have nearly 100 percent take-up, SNAP, Unemployment Insurance and Medicaid have significantly lower take-up rates (65 percent, 30 to 60 percent and 50 to 70 percent, respectively) (Herd and Moynihan 2018). Resources also matter—the more resourced an individual, the better they will be at navigating burdens. Language barriers, cognitive difficulties, and life-related stress can all impact whether an individual is able to overcome a burden (Christensen et al. 2020; Masood and Nisar 2021a).

Burdens are also distributive in that the more ways an individual interacts with government, the more burdens they will face. In the US, that ends up meaning that for poor people, the association of government is that of burdens. People who apply for SNAP most likely also apply for other means-tested programs like Medicaid and the EITC. Poor pregnant people face higher burdens accessing abortion than middle and high-income people, and have been found to have more unplanned pregnancies (Herd and Moynihan 2018). Public perceptions of burdens also matter. Studies have found that people are also more tolerant of burdens when they are target Black people (Johnson and Kroll 2020), poor people, and the unemployed (Baekgaard, Moynihan, and Thomsen 2021). As a result, new burdens introduced for programs whose populations have a negative social construction (e.g. welfare eligibility restrictions) may not face the same type of backlash as programs that are universal.

Burdens are Constructed

Every policy and program, from the most restrictive to the most universal, will have some type of burden associated with it. To access Social Security benefits, an applicant must prove they are over 62; if a parent wants to enroll their child in New York City's universal pre-k, they must demonstrate that they are New York City residents. These compliance costs are created out of necessity to grant access based on policy-specific criteria, which exists to achieve the policy's goal. Many of the compliance costs individuals encounter when applying to a program or service are put into place to ensure that only the policy's target population receives benefits.

However, burdens are also constructed as an ideological policy tool. While abortion access may be the most obvious, requiring in-person meetings, shortening the amount of time before having to recertify eligibility, or requiring multiple types of identification are all burdens that have been created in the past decade across a multitude of programs. Burden construction is often hidden in the mundane; the length of forms is a great example of a burden that usually goes unnoticed and yet can have a demonstrable impact on applicant's lives. A form change can be instituted without a formal change in law and can be written off as a simple mechanical change, rather than a targeted political one. One famous and perhaps absurd example occurred during WWII, when the State Department rolled out a new visa application form that was four feet long (Wyman 2007). More recently, states such as Louisiana and Texas have enacted several abortion-related burdens created under the guise of safety, including requiring doctors to have admitting privileges to perform abortions, as well as perform them at local hospitals (although this requirement in Louisiana was struck down by the Supreme Court in 2020) (Robeznieks 2020). Since burdens are constructed, they can also be deconstructed or shifted so that the bulk of costs fall on the state rather than citizens (Herd 2015). However, any shift in burdens, whether an increase or a reduction, is often a political decision, illustrating how burdens are truly "policy making by other means" (Edelman 1985).

Transgender People & Public Administration

Public administration as a field treats gender normatively. Specifically, research interrogating gender and its impacts view gender as a binary, immutable variable. One result of this norm is that research in the field has summarily left out transgender and gender-expansive people in the United States. In fact, the only research published that addresses the in-depth experiences of transgender people specifically is Muhammad Nisar's work on the Khawaja Sira in Pakistan (Nisar 2021; 2018b; 2018a). With this dissertation I hope to begin to address this gap, mostly through challenging the idea that gender is binary, unchangeable, and easily legible. I do not want to use this introduction to offer a primer on transgender people, or transgender history; that is outside the purview of this work (for work on these topics, see for example, Stryker 2017; Currah and Moore 2009). Instead, I want to call attention to how gender has operated in our field and offer some definitions of key terms that I will utilize throughout the next three chapters.

Key Terms

Transgender is a contested term that means different things for different people. For this dissertation, I rely on Currah's (2022) definition that "transgender refers to anyone whose gender identity—one's internal sense of oneself as male, as female, as both, as neither—does not correspond to social expectations for the sex they were assigned at birth, I also understand transgender to include both binary and non-binary people" (Currah 2022, xvi). Using this definition, I use the terms "transgender," "trans," and "gender expansive" interchangeably throughout this dissertation to encompass the myriad of non-normative gender identities, including nonbinary people. Below are five additional relevant terms for the reader.

Cisgender: cisgender (sometimes shortened to "cis") refers to anyone who gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth. For simplicity's sake, it can be understood as the opposite of trans.

Nonbinary: people who do not identify as either cisgender or transgender, or as any gender fall under the definition of nonbinary. Nonbinary identity can also encompass labels such as agender, genderqueer, genderfluid, or bigender.

Misgender/misgendering: misgendering is when an individual is referred to as a gender they are not (either by themselves or someone else). This includes using incorrect pronouns. For example, using male pronouns (he/him) to describe a trans woman, or referring to her as a man are instance of misgendering. Misgendering can be deliberate or accidental.

Deadname/deadnaming: A deadname is a person's previous name, most often their legal one given at birth. Deadnaming is when a person refers to someone else or themselves by their given legal name if they no longer use it.

Passing: Passing in the context of this dissertation means when a transgender person is not identifiable as trans to cisgender people. This may be intentional or unintentional and may take little to no or inordinate amounts of effort on the part of the trans person. The first widely published account of the use of the word "passing" was in Nella Larsen's 1929 novel *Passing* (Larsen 1929), and applied to Black Americans who passed for white. The term now can have a myriad of definitions, though is nearly always in reference to when an individual is perceived as belonging to a group that they do not.

Motivations

With this dissertation, I am seeking to contribute to and expand administrative burden theory to move past normative interpretations of gender. Chapter 1 asks, what are the learning, compliance, and psychological costs that trans people experience during common interactions with the state? How often are mismatched identity documents a source of these costs? Using primary

survey data and qualitative interviews, I explore burdens experienced by trans people when they applied to or considered applying to three federally funded safety net programs: 1) SNAP; 2) Unemployment Insurance; and 3) Medicaid. I also investigate experiences trans people have had with identity documents that do not match their gender identity, and how that mismatch affects their choices to interact with frontline workers. Finally, I argue that utilizing administrative burdens theory offers a powerful way to understand how state actions not only limit access to services but also control and coerce its citizenry into emulating what I term the "normative sexual citizen."

Chapter 2 builds upon Chapter 1, using the same set in-depth interviews analyzed as part of Chapter 1. Where Chapter 1 looks at administrative burden broadly, Chapter 2 focuses specifically on the psychological costs that trans people experience as a product of citizen-state interactions. It asks: How does stigma— both internal and treatment—impact citizen-state interactions? How do frontline workers increase or decrease these burdens? And finally, how do psychological costs impact longer-term effects on wellbeing? In answering these questions, I propose that trans people work to emulate the normative sexual citizen as a coping mechanism to handle citizen-state interactions. I also argue that this emulation is so ubiquitous seen as required that it should also be considered a compliance cost.

Chapter 3 offers a theoretical exploration of burdens, asking the question, when, where and how do burdens become violent? How do burdens reenforce norms and create new ones? And how do burdens sort and then push "problem bodies" to the edges of society? I first look at how burdens restrict access through administrative changes, particularly when doing so via changing laws is untenable or illegal. I turn to Spade's concept of "administrative violence," or the ways that government systems, bureaucratic processes, and institutionalized norms create and perpetuate violence. Ultimately, because burdens do not automatically produce violence, but do automatically

sort the population to some capacity, I settle on Foucault's concept of governmentality as the most useful avenue to extend administrative burden to include instances of violence.

Taken together, these three chapters are meant as a starting point. In answering each chapter's research questions, my goal is to build a foundation for both my own research agenda, but also for our field to use to better understand both what gender is, and how it functions. My ultimate goal for this dissertation is that it inspires future administrative burden and public administration scholars to understand that gender is not only an independent variable, but also an ever-changing label with that can determine who is counted, who is deserving, and who is pushed to the margins.

Chapter 1: Normative Sexual Citizens: Administrative Burden, Citizen-State Interactions, and Transgender People in the US

Introduction

In November 2011, Andrea Jones, a transgender woman from Morristown, Tennessee, went to her local Department of Safety to change the gender marker on her driver's license. Jones had had gender-affirming surgery the year before and had successfully changed the gender marker on her Social Security card. Despite this, and a letter from her surgeon stating she no longer had testicles, the Department of Safety denied the request, stating that she needed more proof. Angered by the denial, Jones left the office and removed her shirt, stating, "if I was a male, I had the right to, when I stepped out the door, take off my shirt." (Gieseke 2011). She was subsequently arrested for indecent exposure. Ironically, after arresting her, the police stated, "Mr. Jones continued to yell that he had the right to show his breasts in public…and wanted to be recognized as a female." She was then placed in the men's wing of a Tennessee state prison. Even though Andrea Jones completed the steps she thought were sufficient for a gender marker change, a frontline worker had the discretion to decide otherwise.

Jones's Kafkaesque exemplifies the all-too-common experience people with nonnormative identities have with administrative burdens and frontline workers. Despite the commitment public servants make to public values of equality, street-level "workers' judgments are more moral than legal"(Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003, 18) and clients who do not adhere (or attempt to

adhere) to the requirements of being what I term the "normative sexual citizen"[1] are deemed morally reprehensible. Highly racialized and binarily gendered, the normative sexual citizen is white, heterosexual, cisgender, and able-bodied, and is a model that the norms and values of the US require us to adhere to. Individuals who do not meet the requirements outright (i.e. people of color, LGBTQ people, disabled people) must position themselves as closely as possible normative sexual citizenship through dress and behavior. Failure to do so can lead to increased administrative burdens as frontline workers wield their discretion to "decide who is a good or bad person, who has rights and who is disenfranchised, and what community actions are tolerated or punished." (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003, 24).

Empirical studies have demonstrated how banal administrative measures produce burdens, controlling access as a form of "politics by other means" (Herd and Moynihan 2018). Burdens also arise from administrative errors, poor administrative capacity, bureaucratic bias, and bad policymaking (Peeters 2020). Regardless of the source, burdens are gendered; they are "experiences of coercive and controlling state actions that directly regulate gendered bodies, labor and identity" (Herd and Moynihan 2024, 1). Despite the prevalence of gendered burdens, burden research and the field of public administration assumes gender as binary. The exception being Nisar (2018a, 2018b), whose work with the Khawaja Sira in Pakistan offers a useful lens for investigating gendered burdens in the US. This paper seeks to address this gap in the administrative burden literature both empirically and theoretically. Empirically, this study descriptively investigates the burdens incurred by trans adults in the US who considering applying or applied for SNAP, Medicaid, and Unemployment Insurance. Unlike most empirical work, I focus on people who either considered applying or applied to any of the three programs, rather than those who receive benefits. I also

[1] The normative sexual citizen is similar to Carter's (2007) "normal American" but is a product of values institutionalized through state actions and discretion rather than mass media.

investigate if trans people frame the barriers they face as a product of being trans. Theoretically, I extend Herd and Moynihan's (2024) gendered burdens to build a foundation for better understanding the implications of diverging from the normative sexual citizen and call the field to view gender more expansively.

My findings demonstrate that like cisgender people, transgender people navigate certain universal burdens (e.g. learning how to apply, spending time waiting to speak with a caseworker, etc.) but also navigate burdens that are produced because trans people are not normative sexual citizens. Specifically, I find that trans people often align their gender presentation with their state-issued identity documents. This aligning with one's state-sanctioned sex is done as a tactic to protect themselves against accusations of fraud (in cases when their outward appearance does not reflect the photo on their ID) and fear of stigma and violence because of their identity, regardless of transition state. That is, trans people will position themselves as normative sexual citizens by adhering to gender norms in accordance with the sex on their documents in attempts to keep themselves safe when interacting with frontline workers. As a result, I argue that for trans people, but also for all marginalized people, interacting with the government comes with the compliance cost of adhering to ideals of the normative sexual citizen to access programs and be deemed worthy of services.

Social Construction & Administrative Burden

The Archetype of Fraud

In the US, gender variance has been aligned with dishonesty and fraud for centuries. While cities began to pass anti-crossdressing laws en masse beginning in the 1850s, since colonial times laws forbid people "disguising" themselves "in a dress not belonging to his or her sex" (Sears 2015, 2). These anti-crossdressing laws "were not idiosyncratic or archaic regulations but foundational city codes" that served as a governmental strategy to construct "normative gender, reinforce inequalities,

and generate new modes of exclusion from public life" (Sears 2015, 3). In these earlier years, crossdressing was seen as both fraudulent and immoral—New York and California both passed laws that criminalized "public disguise or masquerade for the purpose of avoiding identification" (Sears 2015, 4), and crossdressing became intrinsically linked with public indecency. These early laws restricted how people (trans or not) appeared in public and interacted with street-level bureaucrats, most often police officers.

A century later in New York City, the Department of Health (DOH) denied a trans woman the ability to change the gender marker on her state-issued ID. Known as "Anonymous" in court documents, she had done everything required at the time to officially change her sex designation—she lived as a woman, had gender-affirming surgery, and was taking feminizing hormones (*Anonymous v. Weiner* 1966, quoted in Currah and Moore 2009). Even though the DOH had granted previous gender-marker change requests to other women, NYC Commissioner of Health, Dr. George James, concluded that "the desire of concealment of a change of sex by [Anonymous] is outweighed by the public interest for protection against fraud" (New York Academy of Medicine 1966, quoted in Currah and Moore 2009).

These early instances of anti-trans laws in the US produced burdens for trans people in the 19th and 20th centuries. But perhaps more importantly, early anti-crossdressing, vagrancy, and other laws that were used to police how people represented their gender in public solidified notions of gender that have given way to the burdens that trans people experience now. Even as more states allow trans people to change sex markers on state-issued IDs, Medicaid to cover gender-affirming care, and trans people become generally more visible, the history of gendered burdens persists. Social and organizational norms are "critical determinants of bureaucratic behavior in front-line organizations" (Nisar and Masood 2019, 1). Ideas of how clients should show up in public and in program offices, their "cultural abidance," can dictate who is considered a worthy citizen and who is

not (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003, 4). For trans and other gender nonnormative people, the illegibility of their bodies and identities is a site of friction; being not easily sortable jams up the works of "benign mass-processing" that street-level bureaucrats rely on (Lipsky 1980/2010), forcing the client to be judged "in the context of social relations and less… in the context of formal duties and responsibilities defined by law and policy" (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003, 20).

Identity & Burdens

The historical archetypes of the masquerading gender-bender (Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 2011; Bettcher 2008) have led trans people to be socially constructed (Schneider and Ingram 1993) as deviants. Not only does a group's social construction have a radical impact on how they are perceived, it also impacts the rationales used to create or alleviate burdens (Herd and Moynihan 2018). Groups who are seen as deviants are most often the target of punishments and sanctions (Schneider and Ingram 1993). However, identities do not occur in a vacuum, and intersecting identities compound experiences of oppression (Crenshaw 1989). Crenshaw's intersectionality plays out for trans people of color, particularly Black trans women. Because Black trans women must navigate the stereotypes of Black people, women, and transgender people, who "are regularly associated with crime and deviance," because "there is often an innate association between these identities and engagement in sex work or survival sex" (Butz and Gaynor 2022, 435). These intersecting stereotypes result in increased burdens, exacerbated by frontline workers, who utilize their discretion to "ensure that bodies that contest or problematize the definitions of normality are denied visibility, mobility, and access to the public spaces of society"(Nisar and Masood 2019, 10). This results in applying burdens differentially for racial minorities, particularly women (Ray, Herd, and Moynihan 2023). For trans women of color, these disproportionate burdens make finding full-time employment and accessing benefits a struggle. (Butz and Gaynor 2022).

The racialized history of state control in this country demonstrates how racism has become and remains institutionalized and is not only perpetuated by street-level discretion. Functionally, the institutionalized nature of racism and gender norms mean that trans people, particularly Black trans women, are often the target of more punishing burdens. Whiteness has remains the norm that confers deservingness and access (Harris 1993), both formally through laws and policies and informally through policy implementation and bureaucratic discretion. In tandem with social construction, Ray et al.'s (2020) racialized burdens framework demonstrates how administrative obstacles function as their own set of politics, working behind the scenes under the guise of rules and regulations (Moynihan, Herd, and Harvey 2015). As a result, burdens of any kind are more onerous for people of color, while also exacerbating and perpetuating state control, framing such acts as necessary to combat fraud and abuse (Ray, Herd, and Moynihan 2020). This is occurring currently; many southern states, particularly states with higher concentrations of trans people of color are introducing policies that would make being trans more burdensome such as removing gender affirming care from Medicaid coverage, not allowing for gender marker changes on IDs, and allowing for discrimination of trans people on religious grounds ("Trans Legislation Tracker," n.d.).

Despite the historical record of laws producing what scholars would more recently describe as psychological burdens, this history has been relegated to the world of queer and gender studies, and gender is still treated as binary in most of the administrative burden and public administration literature. For instance, while Halling and Baekgaard (2022) find in their systematic literature review of administrative burden articles that there are 50% more studies on psychological burdens, none of the cited work focus on transgender people in the US. The exception to this narrow view of gender is the work of Nisar (2018a; 2018b). Those groundbreaking papers are the only empirical work that centers gender expansive people, in this case the Khawaja Sira of Pakistan. Importantly, Nisar (2018b) offers a first look at what I will later in this paper describe as trans-specific burdens,

describing how "rules that appear to be neutral put disproportionate burden on the Khwaja Sira because of the different social biases associated with their gender conformity" (105). While the context differs between the US and Pakistan, the experiences of the Khwaja Sira echo the experiences of many of my study participants.

Several issues arise from the lack of scholarship on trans people. Most notably, most studies of psychological costs center the stress or loss of autonomy individuals experience when forced to complete tasks that they find worthless, nonsensical, or demeaning (Herd and Moynihan 2018; Auyero 2011), or the stigma they anticipate facing or face as being members of marginalized group, such as SNAP recipients. Both societal stigma, the "negative beliefs, attitudes, and stereotypes society holds," and anticipated stigma, "the expectation of being the target of prejudice, discrimination, or negative stereotypes" (Lasky-Fink and Linos 2023, 5) have negative impacts on service application and receipt (e.g. Gladstone et al. 2021; Hall, Zhao, and Shafir 2014). However, in these contexts, stigma is a product of being poor and/or a public benefits recipient, rather than a facet of a person's identity. Trans people, who may experience these stigmas, also face an identity that for centuries has been aligned with deception and fraud, and more recently has been associated with pedophilia or "grooming" (Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 2011, Bettcher 2008; Center for Countering Digital Hate 2022). Additionally, identity-based issues manifest differently than program-specific costs, producing different burdens and citizen-state interactions. For trans people, being trans, or even simply perceived as trans, may lead to service denial, humiliation, or even violence. Twenty-two percent (22%) of 2022 United States Transgender Survey respondents reported that they had been "harassed, assaulted, asked to leave a location or denied services" when they presented an ID with a name or gender that did not match their presentation (James et al. 2024). Trans people who have navigated the compliance and learning costs of updating documents may still experience this violence if they do not adequately "pass" as cisgender.

At the same time, the literature does not adequately address the psychological harm that burdens can produce. Having one's identity or lived experiences denied as legitimate and outright humiliation because of one's identity are all unique costs that come from identity. They can occur in welfare offices, courtrooms, and state-sanctions rehab facilities, along with other interactions with the state (James et al. 2016; Spade 2015). For example, sex-segregated homeless shelters often force trans and gender nonconforming people to dress according to their sex assigned at birth to gain access (Spade 2006). Even if the intent is not to explicitly cause harm, the impact can have the same effects as the psychological costs cited in the administrative burden literature, meriting further study.

In addition to citizen-state interactions that produce psychological costs, administrative procedures and policies, particularly regarding identity documents, can produce burdens that restrict trans people's access and movement:

> Within modern bureaucratic society, many kinds of routine administrative procedures make life very difficult for people who cross the social boundaries of their birth-assigned genders. Birth certificates, school and medical records, professional credentials, passports, driver's licenses, and other such documents provide a composite portrait of each of us as a person with a particular gender, and when these records have noticeable discrepancies or omissions, all kinds of problems can result: inability to cross national borders, qualify for jobs, gain access to needed social services, and secure legal custody of one's children (Stryker 2017, 8).

Issues with documentation are a major barrier for trans people. Early reports from the 2022 USTS found that only 19% of all participants had all of their documentation updated to correctly reflect their gender identity, and 48% had none of their documents changed (James et al. 2024). Additionally, automation and information sharing can put trans people at risk of losing eligibility, being outed, or accused of fraud when their identity documents do not match their gender presentation or differ across agencies. At the same time, some of the technical approaches to decreasing burdens may negatively impact trans people. For example, "for services that require verifying identity and eligibility, combining a mixture of technology and administrative data offers the promise of few compliance burdens" (Herd and Moynihan 2018, 22). However, like mismatched

documents, mismatched administrative data can also lead to outing, accusations of fraud and general mistreatment by street-level bureaucrats or even employers. Social Security "no match letters" are a salient example. These written notices are issues by the Social Security Administration when there is a discrepancy between an employee's name and Social Security number (United States Justice Department, n.d.)

Finally, in most citizen-state interactions, frontline workers can assuage or exacerbate burdens for their clients; street-level bureaucratic discretion and behavior are sources of the burdens' distributive nature. This is in part because "the poorer people are, the greater influence street-level bureaucrats have over them" (Lipsky 1980/2010, 6). Frontline workers use moral policing of gender along with their discretion to selectively implement rules that can increase burdens for trans people. The issue then arises that, "if street-level workers judge citizen-clients as unworthy—as 'bad guys'—then rules are used to withhold or minimize services or at times to punish, even to be brutal" (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003, 153). Because trans people in the US face the social construction of being inherently deviant, untrustworthy, and hypersexual, when labeled such by a caseworker, there is little they can do to shed that label.

Expanding Gender

This paper develops new theoretical groundwork and challenges public administration as a field to wrestle with gender beyond the binary. I expand public administration's traditional conceptualization of gender by centering trans people in the US and their experiences with the administrative state. Using quantitative and qualitative data, I argue that trans people face identity-specific learning, compliance, and psychological costs in ways cisgender people do not, and that these burdens are born from institutionalized gender norms. While the number of studies interrogating the intersections of gender and the administrative state continue to increase (e.g. Nisar and Masood 2019; Maier 2020; Butz and Gaynor 2022), little research has focused on how burdens

are gendered, reifying gender as a binary, immutable construct. Herd and Moynihan (2024) offer one of the few papers published in a public administration journal, arguing that, "administrative burdens are a means of control and coercion that regulate gendered bodies, labor and identities" (3) that "reinforce heteronormative and cisnormative constructions of gender" (15). They argue that identity documents, in particular, constrain and regulate an individual's sex by forcing them to establish their gender via official means, most commonly by changing the gender marker on a license or passport. This paper argues that while mismatching identity documents increase compliance and psychological costs, and that verifying one's gender identity is a burdensome process, there are a myriad costs, most notably psychological costs, that arise outside of the task of changing one's gender marker. Because the state reifies norms, having a body that does not reflect what is generally perceived as normal generates fear of interacting with frontline workers, even when an individual has updated their IDs to reflect their gender identity.

I also argue that the archetype of the normative sexual citizen is a disciplinary norm that requires compulsory cisness when interacting with the administrative state. For trans people, this means passing as cisgender or at least making an outward attempt to align with binary gender norms. According to Spade (2015), disciplinary norms are a pervasive part of culture, governing the lives of all citizens:

> Through disciplinary norms, we are taught how to be a proper man, woman, boy, girl; how to be healthy, chaste, punctual, productive, intelligent, outgoing, or whatever qualities are valued in our context; and how to avoid (or attempt to avoid) being labeled as truant, criminal, mentally ill, backward, promiscuous, lazy, sociopathic, addicted, slow, or whatever qualities or types are discouraged (Spade 2015, 60).

To go against these norms—that is to not pass, or not attempt to pass—is nearly always an assurance that a trans person opens themselves up to psychological costs that range from discomfort to violence. Perceived compulsory cisness stems from the archetype of the fraudulent trans person, discussed previously. For non-cisgender people, regardless of gender identity or race, there is a

feeling that to interact with the state, especially to access benefits, one must emulate the normative sexual citizen via how one dresses, acts, and evens speaks to those who have the power of the state backing their decisions. Because the normative sexual citizen is white, straight, cisgender, and able-bodied, anyone who is not must work to align themselves as closely as possible with those identities. In practice, this looks like distancing oneself from any behavior that would lead to being labeled as undeserving, deviant, or other.

Methodology

For this chapter, I utilized a sequential explanatory design (Creswell and Plano Clark 2017), fielding two primary data collection efforts—first surveying 465 US-based transgender adults, and then interviewing a subset of 43 survey participants who consented for follow-up. The University of Washington's Human Subjects Division approved both collection phases. Participants had to have considered applying for or applied for SNAP, Medicaid, and/or Unemployment since identifying as trans, nonbinary, or another non-cisgender identity. Additionally, I recruited four trans people to serve on my advisory committee. The purpose of the advisory committee was for members of the community to offer feedback in this project as lay people. None of the four were in public administration, which greatly aided in making sure that my survey questions were understandable to people outside of the field. The committee aided in participant recruitment and survey question development, ultimately piloting the survey, making sure that it worked seamlessly and took less than ten minutes to complete.

This mixed-methods approach has several advantages. Namely, the qualitative interviews offered deeper understanding of quantitative survey answers. Quantitative surveys provided a breath of experiences of administrative burden and allowed me to investigate similarities and differences by factors such as age, race, and gender identity. However, because the way we experience burdens is both distributive and deeply personal (Herd and Moynihan 2018), a quantitative instrument fails to

gather the nuances of participant experiences. Through follow-up interviews, I attained a deeper understanding of participants' experiences with the state and learned about the feelings those experiences produced. By utilizing a sequential design rather than a survey with open-ended questions, I tailored my interview instrument based on initial quantitative findings, asking interview participants to expanded upon their survey answers.

I chose to focus on SNAP, Medicaid and Unemployment for multiple reasons. First, SNAP and Unemployment are two of the most highly utilized safety net programs in the country (King 2022). In 2023, over 41.9 million people received SNAP benefits (DeSilver 2023), and 5.2 million received Unemployment (United States Department of Labor, n.d.). Because trans people experience higher levels of poverty (Carpenter, Eppink, and Gonzales 2020; Carpenter, Goodman, and Lee 2024), it stands that they would highly utilize these programs as well. Additionally, a recent Williams Institute report found that trans people faced higher levels of food insecurity during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic than cisgender people and had higher rates of SNAP usage (O'Neill and Conron 2021). At the same time, despite high levels of usage, SNAP and Unemployment have high compliance costs that vary by state.

I chose to ask participants about their experiences when considering applying to Medicaid because in recent years, Medicaid has turned into a battleground issue for trans people and access to care. To date, legislatures in at least ten states have introduced bills that would bar Medicaid from covering gender affirming care for all ages, with another twelve having unclear or no explicit gender-affirming care policy ("Trans Legislation Tracker," n.d.; Movement Advancement Project 2021). In many states, what is and is not covered is confusing, increasing learning costs. For example, a trans person may not know if Medicaid would cover a broken bone since they are trans (referred to as

"Trans Broken Arm Syndrome;" Knutson et al. 2016).[2] Medicaid-related burdens also illustrate how burdens are constructed. Recently introduced policies are not grounded in science and make false statements such as gender affirming care is "experimental" (Division of Florida Medicaid 2022) or tantamount to child abuse ("Office of the Governor of Texas" 2022). Despite input from multiple medical associations (McNamara et al. 2022), more states are using Medicaid restrictions as policymaking by other means.

I chose these three programs because to access any of them, an applicant must possess a valid ID, thus making possessing IDs a universal compliance cost. While not discussed at length within the administrative burden literature, identity documents are an antecedent to any application-based burden, but also burdensome to update or replace. For trans people, updating IDs come with their own trans-specific compliance, learning, and psychological costs. Learning costs are particularly high in the 18 states that either have no specific form for gender marker changes, unclear policies regarding gender marking changes, or require proof of surgery ("Movement Advancement Project" 2021). Compliance costs, specifically monetary costs are also high. The 2016 USTS found that over 55% of respondents who had changed their name legal paid at least $100, with 10% paying over $500 (James et al. 2016). Finally, the psychological costs of changing the name and gender maker on an ID can be incredibly high as trans people fear ridicule, harassment, and violence from court officers, judges and clerks.

The survey had five main sections—demographics, program application (both considered and actual), burdens experienced, ID possession, and bureaucratic interactions. On average, the survey took eight minutes to complete. At the survey's conclusion, I asked participants if they consented to a follow-up interview, stating that consenting did not assure that they would be

[2] "Trans Broken Arm Syndrome" is a form of medical discrimination where a provider incorrectly attributes a condition (such as a broken arm) as the product of being trans or asks invasive and unnecessary questions about a patient's gender identity or medical transition status that have no bearing on treatment of the condition (Wall, Patev, and Benotsch 2023).

selected. I conducted 43 semi-structed interviews between December 2023 and February 2024 via Zoom. Interviews ranged from 60 to 90 minutes, and participants received a $75 virtual gift card as incentive. I did not collect names, and I assigned all participants a pseudonym. I asked participants about answers they had previously given on the survey, as well as more in-depth questions about barriers faced during application and feelings towards bureaucratic interactions.

Sample and Data

Utilizing purposive sampling (Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim 2016a), I recruited participants via social media and through LGBTQ community centers around the country. Using Instagram and LinkedIn, I first recruited 10 "seeds:" people I knew personally who fit the eligibility requirement of the study and who were well-connected to other trans people. These seeds took my survey, referring others to the study's website to ask for a survey code. I initially took this extra step to ensure that bad actors, specifically anti-trans activists, would not attempt to take the survey. All participants who completed the survey had either considered applying or applied to SNAP, Medicaid, and/or Unemployment, and at that time all believed they were eligible (although a large proportion of those who did not apply said it was because they could not confirm their eligibility). This sample is diametrically different than most administrative burden studies; most work focuses on populations either receiving services or actively applying. My sample thus encapsulates a broader swath of burdens, including those that dissuaded participants from application.

I also posted the survey flyer on queer and trans Facebook groups that I was a part of. These groups are private, and members are vetted, so I included the survey link, rather than requiring people to first contact me. I also contacted 50 LGBTQ centers around the country via email, asking if they would share my flyer with their constituents. I heard back from five who confirmed that they shared the flyer on social media. Finally, I contacted the National Resource Center on LGBTQ aging, who approved my study and posted it to their "LGBTQ+ Research Connections" page. I

ultimately arrived at 465 validated responses. I was able to validate 482 of the over 5,500 responses received as trans people, as opposed to a mix of bots and bad actors who were attempting to receive the survey incentive. Seventeen of those verified as trans adults started the survey but were deemed ineligible because they did not meet one of the eligibility criteria. Table 1 below displays the sample's descriptive statistics.

Variable	N = 465
Race	
White	73.1%
Black	12.7%
Latino/Latina/Latine/Latinx	11.1%
Asian	9.0%
Hispanic	8.0%
Native American/Alaskan Native	3.0%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2.2%
Middle Eastern/North African	1.5%
Gender	
Transfeminine	15.0%
Nonbinary transfeminine	13.5%
Nonbinary	34.8%
Nonbinary transmasculine	21.7%
Transmasculine	14.8%
Age	
Mean (SD)	28.7 (6.4)
Current Region of Residence[3]	
Northeast: New England (CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT)	7.0%
Northeast: Mid-Atlantic (NY, NJ, PA)	17.0%
Midwest: East North Central (IL, IN, MI, OH, WI)	15.1%
Midwest: West North Central (IA, KS, MN, MO, NE, ND, SD)	6.9%
South: South Atlantic (DE, DC, FL, GA, MD, NC, SC, VA, WV)	9.0%
South: East South Central (AL, KY, MS, TN)	0.9%
South: West South Central (AR, LA, OK, TX)	8.2%
West: Mountain (AZ, CO, ID, MT, NV, NM, UT, WY)	8.0%
West: Pacific (AK, CA, HI, OR, WA)	28.0%
Programs (considered and/or applied to)	
SNAP only	16.8%
Medicaid only	9.9%
Unemployment only	9.0%
SNAP & Medicaid	31.6%
SNAP & Unemployment	7.3%
Medicaid & Unemployment	4.7%
SNAP, Medicaid, & Unemployment	20.6%
Name & Gender Marker Changes	
Changed name via court order	37.0%
Changed name on driver's license	18.3%
Changed gender marker on driver's license	24.3%

Table 1: Sample Demographics

[3] States are categorized using Census Bureau-designated regions and divisions.

Analysis

I utilized three logistic regressions, predicting the dependent variable (program application) for each of the three programs. Each regression was a function of three factors: 1) demographics—age, gender identity, race; 2) application to any of the other programs (e.g. for SNAP applicants, whether they had also applied to Medicaid and/or Unemployment); and 3) possession of a driver's license or state ID where the applicant had updated their name and/or their gender. While I asked survey participants about other IDs, including birth certificates, Social Security cards, and work IDs, I only included licenses/state IDs in the regressions because they are the most-utilized type of identity document; 79 percent of US adults over 18 have a driver's license or state ID card (Rothschild, Novey, and Hanmer 2024).

For the qualitative component of this paper, I took an abductive approach. Abductive analysis is a qualitative approach similar to grounded theory. However, unlike grounded theory's inductive approach which relies on "conceptual abstraction"(Glaser and Strauss 1967/2012, 115), abduction "emphasizes that rather than setting all preconceived theoretical ideas aside during the research project, researchers should enter the field with the deepest and broadest theoretical base possible and develop their theoretical repertoires throughout the research process" (Timmermans and Tavory 2012, 181). Going into the qualitative analysis phase, I brought with me a deep knowledge of the administrative burden and street-level bureaucracy literature but also expected the surprises and anomalies that Timmermans and Tavory mention. Like grounded theory, abduction relies on iterative memo writing and coding, all of which I conducted using ATLAS.ti 24. In my first round of coding, I focused on open coding themes such as types of costs, interactions with frontline workers, and passing. From there, I focused on how participants described the burdens they faced and focused more deeply on how they navigated passing. Working from these memos and codes, I

often revisited transcript excerpts and reread the theory and previous findings that were pivotal to designing this research.

Findings

Program Application

Application rates across the three programs in my sample mirror those found in previous studies. Herd and Moynihan (2018) cite that compared to universal programs such as Social Security or Medicare, these programs only see application rates ranging between 30 and 70 percent. Table 2 displays the application rates across the three programs; Table 3 displays the application rates when broken down into participants' seven program combinations.

Program	Application Rate
SNAP	74.6%
Medicaid	81.3%
Unemployment	82.0%

Table 2: Program Application Rates

Program(s)	SNAP Rate	Medicaid Rate	Unemployment Rate
SNAP only	66.7%	--	--
Medicaid only	--	73.9%	--
Unemployment only	--	--	88.1%
SNAP & Medicaid	78.9%	83.0%	--
SNAP & Unemployment	79.4%	--	73.5%
Medicaid & Unemployment	--	59.1%	77.3%
All three programs	72.9%	86.5%	83.3%

Table 3: Program application rates (in detail)

Based on previous literature, it's not surprising to see that application rates increase when people apply for more than one program. This can happen for several reasons; in many states, SNAP applicants automatically apply for Medicaid, since eligibility in one indicates eligibility in the other. Additionally, learning costs are often lower once a person has been through a similar process.

Applicants understand what the process entails and have likely gathered required documents (Herd and Moynihan 2018). These findings are mirrored in the qualitative interviews I conducted. For example, when asked, "did you learn anything when you applied to SNAP that helped with applying to Medicaid?" one participant responded, "Absolutely, yeah. Making sure I had my documents in order in the correct stuff, and they basically use the same documents for ID and proving citizenship and income. So yeah, that process made it easier."

The main component of my quantitative analysis was to investigate if there are any factors that predict program application. Prior to running the analysis, I hypothesized that the compliance costs of lacking updated identity documents, as well as the societal stigma of being trans, particularly being a trans woman, would predict lower levels of program application. Following Butz and Gaynor's (2022) findings that trans Women of Color (TWOC) had higher levels of program avoidance, I ran three separate models, mirroring theirs. Model 1 compared TWOC and all other trans people, Model 2 compared white trans people and trans People of Color (POC) and then each of the five gender identities; and Model 3 compared white people and POC and then trans women and all other trans people. Models 2 and 3 were not statistically significantly different from Model 1, aligning with Butz and Gaynor's findings. Table 4 below displays Model 1 for each of the three programs. Also in line with Butz and Gaynor, there was no statistically significant change to Model 1 when comparing Black trans women or Indigenous trans women separately from other trans women of color.

	SNAP Application Odds (sig.)	Medicaid Application Odds (sig.)	Unemployment Application Odds (sig.)
Trans Women of Color	1.03 (>0.9)	**9.09 (0.035)**	1.01 (>0.9)
Age	1.01 (0.6)	1.02 (0.6)	0.99 (0.11)
Applied to SNAP	--	**6.58 (<0.0001)**	0.50 (0.8)
Applied to Medicaid	**3.03 (<0.0001)**	--	1.98 (0.11)
Applied to Unemployment	1.08 (0.8)	1.65 (0.2)	--
Changed name on license	2.05 (0.11)	1.31 (0.6)	0.48 (0.2)
Changed gender on license	0.71 (0.3)	1.74 (0.2)	1.10 (0.9)

Table 4: Model 1 Logistic regressions predicting program application

As shown in Table 4, Medicaid was the only program where demographics predicted application, with trans women of color having 9.09 times the odds of applying compared to other trans people ($p = 0.035$). This statistically significant difference did not hold for SNAP or Unemployment. Additionally, possessing an updated driver's license or state ID card did not increase the odds that an individual applied for any of the programs. The only highly significant predictor of application was if a SNAP or Medicaid participant had also applied for the other program. This is not surprising given the previously discussed enrollment practices. Utilizing these findings, I crafted my qualitative instrument to explore more deeply why participants did not apply and what burdens those who did may have experienced after application.

Burdens Experienced

In many ways, the non-statistically significant differences in application likelihood are not surprising. Explored in this section, participants discussed their needs of survival—of accessing food, medical care, and income after losing a job—as reasons they overcame the barriers they experienced. However, that does not mean that trans people do not experience multiple types of burdens. Rather, these burdens do not necessarily predict non-application. In both their open-ended survey questions and the qualitative interviews, participants identified burdens in both universal and

trans-specific terms. Burdens are universal in that while identity plays a role, they are not identity-specific. For example, while "I was stressed out by the process" could be based on a respondents' race, gender identity, geographic location, or any other number of factors, the source of the stress is not inherently identity based. This contrasts with trans-specific burdens, where a respondent's transness is the root cause of the burden, regardless of if the burden is a learning, compliance, or psychological cost. Fear of mistreatment or denial of services because an applicant is trans, not knowing how to apply for a program if documents did not match physical appearances and needing extra identification due to mismatched documents are all examples of trans-specific burdens. Table 5 below displays the costs survey respondents identified as reasons that they did not apply for problems that they had considered applying to.

Reasons for Not Applying	**SNAP**	**Medicaid**	**Unemployment**
Learning Costs			
Didn't know if I was eligible	67.8%	55.2%	68.6%
Didn't know how to apply	41.1%	43.1%	40.0%
Compliance Costs			
Didn't have an ID that correctly reflects my chosen name	23.3%	25.9%	20.0%
Didn't have an ID that correctly reflects my gender identity	23.3%	22.4%	20.0%
Didn't have time	22.2%	17.2%	8.6%
Psychological Costs			
Stressed out by the process	70.0%	63.8%	62.9%
Worried about mistreatment because I'm trans	31.1%	37.9%	20.0%
Worried about judgment for receiving benefits	30.0%	8.6%	8.6%
Embarrassed to receive benefits	25.6%	10.3%	8.6%
Worried I'll be denied benefits because I am trans	18.9%	29.3%	14.3%

Table 5: Reasons participants who considered applying cited for not applying for programs

Generally, the distribution of each reason a participant did not apply was similar across programs, apart from, "I didn't have time" and "I'm worried about judgement for receiving benefits." Unemployed people are likely to have more time to apply for benefits, while those trying to apply for SNAP are likely to have less, given SNAP's work requirements. Similarly, it makes sense

that those who considered applying to Unemployment had a lower rate of fearing judgment for receiving benefits since Unemployment is not means-tested (as SNAP and Medicaid are), thus carrying less stigma as "welfare."

Universal Burdens

Of the survey respondents who considered applying but ultimately did not apply to any of the three programs, the top reasons for non-application identified were "I was stressed out by the process" (a psychological cost), "I didn't know if I was eligible," and "I didn't know how to apply" (both learning costs). Multiple participants cited having to "jump through hoops," namely having to fill out paperwork and provide accurate documentation such as paystubs to finish an application, a compliance cost experienced by both those who did and did not apply alike. For others, knowing people who had applied for programs and failed to receive benefits was enough to dissuade them from applying. Still others feared making mistakes on paperwork, navigated administrative errors, and experienced long wait times.

Extra-Governmental Encounters

Many participants discussed learning from other people's application experiences. For example, one nonbinary participant, Mo, said watching a friend try and fail to receive Unemployment led them to refrain from applying:

> I had a friend who was applying for Unemployment and had watched other friends, and I knew it was such a complicated process that it wasn't worth the effort.

In Mo's case, they made the decision not to apply based on "extra-governmental encounters" (Heinrich 2018, 217), where interactions outside of government—in Mo's case, with their friend—deterred them from applying. Their experience exemplifies Bell et al.'s (2024) finding that people learn about the administrative state through both personal experiences as well as from how people like them have been treated. While Mo's experience provides a negative example of how extra-

governmental encounters such as word-of-mouth experiences can increase burdens, the flip side is that social connections, in the form of friends, family members, and coworkers can produce "extra-organizational capital" (Masood and Nisar 2021, 61) providing emotional support to combat psychological costs. This capital can also help to reduce learning costs when applicants have someone to turn to who has previously navigated the application process or understand the process from professional experience. These contacts can walk them through the application process, giving advice on navigating the system, and even tell them which offices to avoid.

Fears of Mistakes

Other people I spoke with, regardless of application status, were worried about "making mistakes" or "getting in trouble" because of paperwork errors. In some cases, participants had previously successfully applied and received SNAP, but the burden of the recertification process kept them from reapplying because they feared making a mistake. Recertification requirements are often so onerous that applicants do not complete the process because they don't understand the steps or fear answering incorrectly. For example, in March 2024, New York City Mayor Eric Adams announced changes to SNAP recertification, eliminating the "six-month letter." Previously sent to recipients six months after they first received benefits, the letter asked that they certify that nothing about their financial circumstances had changed. While the letter served no other purpose, recipients often had their benefits terminated for not completing the paperwork because they did not realize they had to send the letter in even if nothing had changed (Russo 2024).

A trans man that I interviewed, Sam, exemplified the fears of making a mistake that many other participants voiced. Although Sam did ultimately apply for SNAP and Medicaid, when asked what about his application experience was stressful, he said,

> [Being] concerned about making a mistake on the application and then getting in trouble later. And it was just the amount that I had to kind of just guess how to do a lot of the things because not a single step of the process was clear was also stressful. Like what if I'm

> doing this wrong and I get in trouble? Or what if I get rejected and I have to start the process over again? So yes, it was stressful.

Sam's quote above demonstrates how for many people psychological costs and learning costs are interwoven. He wasn't sure how to answer certain questions, and the process itself was unclear. While he overcame these learning costs to ultimately apply, these uncertainties led to the psychological costs of fear and stress of service denial.

Administrative Errors

While Table 5 above lists reasons given by respondents who did not apply, respondents who did apply for programs experienced similar universal psychological costs. Issues of lost paperwork, illustrate how burdens can stem from bureaucratic errors. Widlak and Peeters (2020) demonstrate how administrative errors can not only create burdens in the immediate term but depending on what the correction mechanism is in place, can cause down-stream issues. Ray, another transman, talked about these downstream issues at length. Lost name and gender marker change paperwork and clerical errors cost him money and time, and the process of correcting the errors was onerous even for his lawyer:

> The process of changing my name and gender on legal documents was prolonged due to issues caused by government officials. My Social Security card was halted for months because someone kept inputting my name and gender wrong, causing a freeze on my account because it seemed like someone was hacking it. I had people lose my paperwork again and again, costing me money to have to pay for more official court order paperwork. Name change paperwork was outdated, the language was ambiguous or problematic, and no one would walk me through the process. I had to ask a friend who's an attorney to decode the legalese, and she barely could herself. I know lots of people have horror stories.

For Ray, the universal costs associated with administrative errors quickly teeter on becoming trans-specific, as very few cisgender people run into issues with names and gender markers. Additionally, Ray saying that he knew, "lots of people have horror stories" demonstrates how these administrative issues become so common for certain communities as to become expected. This expectation can lead to anticipated stigma, a psychological cost discussed later in this paper.

Other Universal Costs

Universal learning costs were also high among both applicants and nonapplicants. Across all three programs, between 55 and 69 percent of nonapplicants cited not being able to determine if they were eligible for programs as a reason for not applying. While issues of eligibility were at times due to income levels and employment, multiple interviewees also discussed the grey areas of receiving SNAP if they lived with others. Other respondents talked about issues with government computing systems, paperwork, and the inability to offer any nuance to their situation within the confines of an application. For example, when asked what if anything she found most stressful about her application experience, Mikayla, a transwoman, discussed issues she encountered when attempting to apply for Unemployment:

> Most of the process was stressful, and not because I'm trans. It's a frustrating, slow, clunky, overburdened system that demands a lot of record-keeping and goes off track if you make even tiny mistakes. It also fails to understand the nature of both "gig work" and the sort of consultative/perma-temp work I do as a freelance writer.

Of the 43 people I interviewed, more than 30 percent said that they had issues with websites crashing, phones that were never answered, and emails that bounced back. This was partially due to state systems being overwhelmed by the COVID-19 pandemic, but also due to outdated computer systems. Several people said they faced computer issues with applications filed prior to 2020.

Interestingly, where other studies have found that the stigma of receiving means-tested benefits can dissuade eligible individuals from applying (e.g., see Bartlett, Burstein, and Hamilton 2004), the majority of people I interviewed said that even if they felt that stigma, receiving benefits ultimately mattered more. One transmasculine nonbinary participant talked about how while they had previously felt some stigma, "at this point in [their] life, [they] know that [they] are the person who needs and deserves these services." Another transwoman said that while she understands why some people have negative feelings about people receiving benefits, "I don't. Yeah, I am fine getting benefits. I do not mind."

Trans-Specific Burdens

In addition to the universal or non-identity-specific burdens discussed in the previous section, many participants in both the survey and interviews described burdens that they encountered specifically because they are trans. Like universal burdens, these trans-specific burdens encompass learning, compliance, and psychological costs. However, unlike universal burdens, most trans-specific burdens experienced were psychological costs due to the stigma of being trans, whether societal or anticipated. Anticipated stigma may be the result of previous personal bad experiences but can also stem from knowing other people who have had bad ones as well, such as Ray and Mo discussed previously. Anticipated stigma can also come from being aware that one belongs to a highly stigmatized group. For respondents, knowledge that trans people are often seen as frauds, and fear that frontline workers won't understand them or will penalize them, was a nearly universal theme throughout my qualitative data.

These psychological costs center around two separate but linked versions of anticipated stigma: the anticipated stigma of being perceived as or being outed as trans, and/or the anticipated stigma of being seen as undeserving. Both revolve around the knowledge that the bureaucrats who have discretion could deny the applications of those they saw as fraudulent or undeserving, as in, those they deemed to not be normative sexual citizens. These fears split participants into three distinct groups—those who did not pass as their gender identity and hadn't updated their IDs, those who started a medical transition but hadn't updated their primary ID (usually a driver's license or state ID card), and participants who both passed and had updated at least their primary ID. For the first group, not passing as their gender identity usually meant that they either had to "pretend" to be cisgender to match the gender on their primary ID or had to correct frontline workers who they interacted with. As a result, trans people are keenly aware that how caseworkers perceive them has an impact on their outcomes. People in this group avoided causing discomfort or being labeled a

"difficult client," because they felt that to do so meant risking not receiving help from caseworkers. Barnes and Henly (2018, 165) argues that how clients interpret "who (or what) controls the quality of a bureaucratic encounter" determines whether clients decide to apply for benefits in the future. This type of stigma differs from the stigma usually discussed in administrative burden literature, which most often focuses on shame. Anticipated stigma due to one's identity is more structural, and thus more difficult to assuage.

Group 1: Those Who Did Not Pass & Hadn't Updated IDs

For trans people, interpreting how caseworkers will handle their gender identity may impact future application but also how they navigate bureaucratic interactions generally. TJ, a transman who felt he did not pass and had not updated any of his IDs, spoke of how previous bad experiences led him to intentionally deadname and misgender himself to receive services:

> If I mention my name outside of my legal name, they will not pass [my case] on or write down notes. They question my email with my non legal name on it. I am often unable to correct them because it makes the air awkward or they'll ask if the name I'm saying is my legal name, and hint that it doesn't matter because it's not going on the paperwork.

For TJ, actively misgendering and deadnaming himself was severely stressful and anxiety-inducing. "Pretending" to be cisgender brought on dysphoria as well as fears of "getting caught."

At the same time, other participants who worked to pass as the gender on their original primary IDs saw it as a necessary tactic that luckily was not a debilitating psychological cost. When asked if interacting with caseworkers was stressful, Dean, a transman who had not yet medically transitioned when he applied for SNAP and Medicaid, discussed dressing "a bit more femme":

> I was still able to play into femme mode enough… like it didn't raise any flags for anybody. Because all my gender markers matched, my voice, like, I hadn't been on T[estosterone] yet. I was still passing as the gender marker and all my documents, so it worked well enough… I was able to pass as female with without trying too, too hard. For any in-person interactions I'd [say to myself], "Okay, well, I will wear like some bigger earrings than usual." Just to kind of like lean into [my femininity].

There is a limit to how much a trans person can pass as the assigned gender on the IDs without additional effort. In Dean's case above, he "femmed it up" until he started a medical transition in order to mitigate anticipated issues with frontline workers.

Group 2: Those Who Had Started to Medically Transition, But Hadn't Updated any IDs

For participants who hadn't updated their IDs but had started a medical transition, bureaucratic interactions often made them fear service denial or accusations of fraud. As one trans man, Connor, stated,

> Since transitioning I have found the process to be way more stressful and uncomfortable. I have to deadname myself. I have to say I am a gender that I am not. I am anxious every time I have to have a conversation with a case worker… especially with phone interviews now, my voice is so deep that I sound like a cis man, so I'm terrified they are going to accuse me of fraud or something.

Many trans people who had started to transition medically but hadn't changed their name and IDs said they hadn't because of the compliance costs, particularly the monetary cost of name changes. Over one third (36.8%) of respondents who had not changed their name cited cost as a reason that they hadn't. The result was that many participants were in a limbo of working towards aligning their physical body with their identity, while having to simultaneously pretend like it wasn't happening.

Group 3: Those Who Passed

Interestingly, even participants who both passed and had updated their IDs felt the need to lean into binary gender norms when interacting with frontline workers. Megan, a trans woman, discussed that even though she was read as a woman in all her interactions and had female on all of her IDs, she still changed how she spoke, dress and acted in the presence of street-level bureaucrats:

> I definitely make more of an effort to raise my voice to be higher in pitch. The resonance is the most important part. But yeah, when I'm interacting with [frontline workers], I do actually make an extra effort [to pass]... when I'm presenting my ID, I make sure to raise my voice and try to appear more demure, I guess.

For Megan, acting "demure" was a way to align herself with the binary norm of femininity, in addition to having a higher voice. Even though she identified as a butch lesbian, she talked about acting much more passively when interacting with frontline workers. She said she did this in part because as a transwoman, she didn't want her butch masculinity to lead to anyone questioning her womanhood. Even though she had not run into any issues after updating her documents, she felt safer presenting herself as a normative sexual citizen when interacting with frontline workers, "acting" both cisgender and heterosexual.

Like Megan, Kai, a trans man who also always passed as cisgender, felt the need to align himself with a binary presentation of masculinity to strangers. Even though he had updated all of his IDs, Kai felt the need to lean into stereotypes of both masculinity and heterosexuality when interacting with caseworkers:

> I would say I deepen my voice when I talk on the phone [with bureaucrats]. If there is a government employee that to me reads as cis[gender and heterosexual] I'll call them "boss" or "sir." I will even tone down being read as queer because the way that I tend to get read in society is as a gay man. So I will even tone that down. Yeah, I'll tone that down and I'll butch things up and not use the same inflections that I [normally] use. I'll have a kind of more monotone voice and speak in a lower tone.

Megan, Kai, and many others voiced not feeling secure enough by passively passing, even if it had been years since they were misgendered. Instead, they felt that to safely access government services, they had to align themselves with binary gender presentations to be more convincingly cisgender. In fact, many participants I interviewed and surveyed said that they made active attempts to pass as whatever gender was listed on their ID. A few participants, particularly nonbinary ones, said that even if they did not change how they dressed or acted, they simply would not correct anyone who misgendered them. Multiple survey participants added similar experiences to the open-ended question, "what, if anything, did you find stressful about the application process?" For trans and nonbinary people, attempts to portray oneself as a normative sexual citizen through compulsory cisness is not only a psychological cost, but also a compliance cost of citizen-state interactions.

Conclusion

The concept of the normative sexual citizen offers an avenue for public administration to expand its understanding of gender beyond the binary. Administrative burden studies, and public administration as a field, can utilize this broader understanding to more deeply interrogate how the state shapes inequality using deeply structural norms of who is and is not deserving based on gender.

This mixed-method study of transgender people's experiences of administrative burden in the US offers one of the first studies of how trans people navigate the costs of accessing safety-net programs. I interrogate the relationships not only between burdens and program application, but also how the disciplinary norm of the normative sexual citizen requires compulsory cisness from gender non-normative people. This trans-specific compliance costs illustrates how "burdens help the state regulate gender and shape gender relations" (Herd and Moynihan 2024, 2) and leads to other trans-specific burdens. Namely, trans people often see a need to adhere to aligning their appearance with the sex is listed on their identity documents, regardless of their actual gender identity. This need to portray oneself as a normative sexual citizen through compulsory cisness is born out of gendered and racialized ideas of who is deserving of government aid in the United States. This deeply entrenched structural norm goes mostly unnoticed by cisgender people, but leads to trans people anticipating that any citizen-state interaction will be onerous simply because they are trans. That is, in addition to the well-documented costs associated with applying for SNAP, Medicaid, and Unemployment, there are learning, compliance, and psychological costs that are only experienced by non-cisgender people solely due to their gender identity.

Utilizing administrative burdens theory offers a powerful way to understand how state actions not only limit access to services but also control and coerce its citizenry into emulating the normative sexual citizen. Further research incorporating this concept could provide new avenues to interpret burdens at the program-specific level, as well as more broadly at the structural level. To

advance the field, scholars would benefit from centering the experiences of those who do not or cannot fit the mold of normative sexual citizenry. Future theoretical work could examine the historical context in which early bureaucracy and state control in this country created and embedded the normative sexual citizen as a figure to emulate.

Because my survey and interview participants were drawn from a purposive sample, their experiences are not representative of the overall trans population in the US. Further, because of my eligibility criteria, I also cannot generalize about the experiences of trans people who utilized programs prior to identifying as trans. However, the aim of this paper was to investigate the experiences of a marginalized group that has yet to be discussed in the public administration literature at length. The findings of this paper expand the current theory and lay theoretical groundwork to better understand the unique needs and experiences of non-cisgender people when interacting with the state.

Findings from this study raise questions about mitigating burdens that are not easily tangible. How can we the field address burdens in "rights-depriving venues" (Herd et al. 2023, 8) when these burdens are deeply entrenched norms and values? If previous administrative burden work has focused on processes and procedures to alleviate costs, what mechanisms could reduce these less tangible but no less damaging burdens? If program application is no longer the only target to change, how do we measure a reduction of gendered and racialized burdens? Shifting the focus from the early theory of burdens—that burdens can be illustrated as learning, compliance, psychological, and more recently redemption costs (Barnes 2021)—and towards how the state produces and reifies coercive actions may be one avenue. Additionally, given the racialized nature of these gendered burdens, future research should focus on how state regulation of gender confines citizens into gender roles governed by proximity to whiteness. In practice, this means interrogating how people are deemed deserving based on how well they adhere to the norms and behaviors views as

acceptable by white elites (Bayker forthcoming). While there is an increasing number of studies on racialized burdens and access to services (e.g. see (Bell et al. 2023; Ray, Herd, and Moynihan 2023), the public administration field would greatly benefit from scholarship devoted specifically to investigating the connection between Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality and state control.

Future research could investigate policy feedback through extra-governmental encounters, particularly through word of mouth and social networks. This mechanism of policy feedback has yet to be considered in-depth in the administrative burden literature. How do marginalized groups rely on social connections to navigate citizen-state interactions? How much do people learn about the administrative state from their own interactions versus from how people "like them" have been treated (Bell, Kappes, and Williams 2024)? Investigating these questions could aid in better understanding how burdens are onerous not only for those who have first-hand experience, but also for people who are a degree removed but are no less dissuaded.

More research should interrogate how street-level bureaucrats possess discretion to dictate an individual's identity in the eyes of the state. While Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003) note that street-level workers "have a say about who people are… assigning them a social identity or group belonging" (21), this is mostly in reference to labels such as, "deserving," "good," or "worthy." Instead, further work is needed to more deeply understand how the state can dictate identities that are generally viewed as immutable. For gender, this means more deeply investigating how frontline workers have the ability to dictate a person's official gender because they have the power of the state behind them (Bell et al. 2023; Ray, Herd, and Moynihan 2023).

The theory of the normative sexual citizen offers a novel and powerful tool to more deeply investigate state power and control. Permeating citizen-state interactions, this disciplinary norm particularly impacts how trans and other non-cisgender people interact with the state, especially for people of color. This paper utilizes this concept as a lens to understand how trans people see the

learning, compliance, and psychological costs of accessing benefit programs, and whether they view these costs in universal or trans-specific terms. In additional to making theoretical contributions, this paper offers some of the first empirical analysis of citizen-state interactions for transgender people in the US. More research is needed to better understand how marginalized communities face unique administrative burdens. Specifically, the field would benefit from further investigating compliance costs associated with adhering to the requirements of the normative sexual citizen, and how the racialized and gendered history of this country reifies these norms through "policymaking by other means" (Herd and Moynihan 2018).

Chapter 2: "I deadnamed myself until my documents matched": Trans People's Coping Strategies During Citizen-State Interactions

"Information about the individual helps to define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what he will expect of them and what they may expect of him. Informed in these ways, the others will know how best to act in order to call forth a desired response from him."

-Erving Goffman, "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life"

Introduction

In March 2015, I moved back home to New York after spending eight years in the Pacific Northwest. Upon returning, one of the first things I did was go to the DMV for a new driver's license. Trans friends had told me that the DMV in Manhattan's Financial District was the best location to go to because the people who worked there were nice, it was never really busy, and you could make an appointment online. I figured that because I had a license from Washington State (where I was moving from) that reflected my new legal name and updated gender marker, I wouldn't have any issues getting a license. The day of my appointment, I put on business casual clothing and got on the subway. At the office, the paperwork was straightforward (name, date of birth, address) until I got to the question, "have you ever had a New York driver's license?" Because I was born and raised in New York, I had previously had one, but with my old name and gender marker. I was immediately filled with the dread that many trans people feel when faced with similar questions. Do I say "yes," and immediately out myself to the frontline worker that I have my appointment with, or say "no," and see how it goes? I decided on the calculated risk of putting "no." That way, either it wouldn't be an issue, or I could always say that I was confused by the questions since while I had had a New York State license, it was under my old name, and I simply interpreted it to be asking about under my current name.

Despite being called up by a very sunnily dispositioned woman in her 60s, the dread and fear of having an unpleasant encounter was increasing. She took my paperwork and began to enter in the information off the form and then paused. "Sir, have you ever had a license in New York?" she asked. "Because I see someone with your Social Security number has previously had a license." I froze, trying to think quickly about how to answer. "Oh yes," I said. "I was confused by the question and thought it meant with this name. I am that person (my old name). I'm sorry." "Oh, not a problem," she responded surprisingly cheerily and immediately started to press what I assume was the backspace button in the "name" field. I took a new photo, and she printed out a temporary license. "Can you check and make sure that your first and last name are spelled correctly?" she asked. I noticed that she had updated my name but not my gender marker. "I'm so sorry," I responded. "But it has an F as the gender marker." "My mistake. Let's change that," She replied. She printed a new temporary license, everything now correct and asked if I needed anything else. "No, that's it. Thank you so much for all your help," I said. "Have a great day!" She smiled and waved goodbye.

Even now, ten years later, I'm not sure how the DMV worker interpreted our interaction. I'm also not positive that I technically had provided all of the documentation required by New York State at the time. The DMV worker could have had lots of practice updating trans people's licenses, or, and what felt more accurate in the moment, is that she simply updated everything because when she looked at me standing in front of her on the other side of the glass, she saw a man. Despite only starting a medical transition a little over two years prior, I had quite quickly grown a full beard, and my voice had dropped. That, along with the updated document from Washington and the fact that I had worn men's business casual for my new photo all meant that to this woman I was legible as a man.

I will never know exactly why this interaction was so generally painless. Yet it offers an example of how we cope with bureaucratic encounters, both through preparation for the encounter and our behavior during. It also provides a lesson on how when our bodies are easily legible (i.e. easily discernable as "man," "woman," "deserving," etc.), our citizen-state interactions run much more smoothly.

Recently, the administrative burden literature has begun to focus on the behavior of clients as they navigate administrative burdens and citizen-state interactions such as mine at the DMV. Studies have looked at the roles of administrative and human capital (Masood and Nisar 2021b; Christensen et al. 2020), mental and physical health issues (Bell et al. 2023), and how citizens cope with bureaucratic encounters (Nielsen, Nielsen, and Bisgaard 2021). These studies expand the field's understanding of individuals and the myriad ways they navigate the psychological costs of interacting with the state. This paper seeks to continue this expansion by incorporating Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical model and theory of impression management with ideas of citizen coping strategies. I use Goffman specially because of his metaphors of "frontstage" and "backstage," the idea that we all act differently when we are in public and when we are in private. I see utility in examining citizen coping with bureaucratic encounters by dividing it into how we dress and act when in the presence of representatives of the state, and how that differs from when we are either in private or interacting with people who do not hold the same amount of power over our lives.

Using interviews with 43 trans adults in the US who have previously participated in a related survey, I find that trans people often deadname or misgender themselves to match the sex on their IDs when interacting with frontline workers so as avoid conflict, mistreatment, and accusations of fraud. From this behavior, I conceptualize a new type to add to Nielsen et al.'s (2021) coping typology: "normalizers."

Coping with Bureaucratic Encounters

While the concept of administrative burden in its current form is relatively young (first appearing in (Goffman 1959), its antecedents can be clearly traced back through bureaucracy literature as early as Weber in 1946 (Heinrich 2016). Kahn, Katz and Gutek's (1976) typology of transactional categories in organizational research provides two types of bureaucratic encounters—"service seeking" and "reaching out." Service seeking is client-initiated; a client contacts an office to receive a service such as applying for SNAP or renewing a driver's license. In these two examples, the person outside of the organization (here the government) interacts with someone inside the organization in their official capacity. This official capacity is both as an employee but also as a person "whose function is to determine the validity and appropriateness of the presenting request, the goodness of fit between it and the franchise, policies, and resources of the organization, and thus the entitlement of the applicant to service" (Kahn, Katz, and Gutek 182). Reaching out is the inverse of service seeking. It is bureaucrat-initiated; in these interactions "the individual target of the transaction is more likely to be reluctant than welcoming" (183), such as being pulled over for speeding by a police officer or being audited by the IRS. In both types of interactions, the ensuing encounters between bureaucrats and citizens can lead to disparate burdens, regardless of who is initiating the interaction. Clients may engage in coping strategies during both types of encounters, but scholars studying coping during bureaucratic encounters have focused on service-seeking encounters, since reaching out is not as predictable. The following section explores coping behavior in greater detail, looking at both pre-encounter preparation and coping during bureaucratic encounters.

What is Coping?

Much of the administrative burden literature has been dedicated to citizen-state interactions and bureaucratic encounters. However, that attention has mainly focused on the experiences of street-level bureaucrats. Nielsen, Nielsen, and Bisgaard (2021), begin to fill this gap in the literature with their study of how individuals cope with bureaucratic encounters. The authors define coping as, "behavioral efforts citizens employ during and in preparing for interaction with public authorities in order to master the demands of the public encounter" (Nielsen et al. 2021, 383). Coping can be behavioral, such as rule bending or acting aggressive, or cognitive, such as emotional detachment (Tummers et al. 2015). While Tummers et al. (2015) define coping as "behavioral efforts frontline workers employ when interacting with clients, in order to master, tolerate, or reduce external and internal demands and conflicts they face" (1100), the same definition can be used from the client standpoint. Taken together with Nielsen et al.'s definition, I view coping as behavior that individuals use, whether in preparation for or during a citizen-state interaction, to tolerate and mitigate stress, stigma, and loss of autonomy at the hands of the state.

The authors outline two main types of coping, preparation, or actions taken before a bureaucratic encounter, and behavior that individuals engage in during bureaucratic encounters. Both types of strategies are important for understanding how individuals interact with frontline workers and representatives of the state. When attempting to decrease psychological costs, as much attention needs to be paid to preparation, where anticipated stigma is felt, as to coping during the actual encounter.

Preparation

An important contribution from Nielsen and colleagues is that coping is as much about preparation as it is the behavior acted upon during citizen-state interactions. Most of the literature

on citizen-state interactions focuses on what occurs during interactions, or how street-level workers view these exchanges. Nielsen and colleagues extend this literature by acknowledging that for individuals, interactions with the state occur before they walk into an office or call a hotline. Baekgaard and Madsen (2024) argue that the anticipation of having to interact with frontline workers exacerbates psychological burdens. This is in part because individuals understand that citizen-state interactions are often marred by what feels like unnecessary requirements, forms, and a loss of autonomy. For marginalized groups, these burdens are increased by anticipated stigma, or "expectations of being the target of prejudice, discrimination, or negative stereotypes" (Lasky-Fink and Linos 2023, 5). Preparing for these interactions helps individuals navigate these burdens, whether it's through information gathering or seeking support in social networks (Nielsen et al. 2021). Information gathering can include official rules, regulations and rights, but it can also be informal, such as finding out if certain offices or individual bureaucrats are deemed easier going or safer. This type of information gathering is tied seeking network support, the other preparatory dimension Nielsen et al. outline. Relying on friends, family, and community to navigate state interactions can also help to assuage psychological and even possibly compliance burdens. For example, knowing that workers at a specific DMV office are more lenient on what constitutes proof of address reduces possibly onerous paperwork requirements for people who may be living in less than legal living situations.

At the same time, preparation likely varies greatly across groups. Individuals who are members of marginalized groups, as well as those less connected to community, may have to prepare to a greater degree to overcome psychological costs. For some, anticipated stigma may be enough to dissuade them from applying, particularly when they are also contemplating applying for a program that carries a lot of stigma (Lasky-Fink and Linos 2023). But intervening in the preparation phase, it may be possible to increase application rates, but more research is needed.

Coping During Interactions

Separate from preparation are the behaviors that individuals engage in during bureaucratic encounters. Once a client has initiated the encounter, Nielsen and colleagues identify seven types of coping behavior—challenging bureaucrats' authority, offering alternative solutions, questing legitimacy of bureaucrat's decisions, game playing, appealing for compassion, and capitulating. From these seven behavioral dimensions and two preparatory dimensions, the authors conceptualize five types of people, each as a composite across the nine dimensions. Their "activists," "fighters," "resisters," "accommodators," and cooperators" are represented in a "three-dimensional space measuring degree of activity, degree of preparation, and degree of opposition" (2021, 381). All five types of citizens engage in coping behavior to both reduce the burdens of bureaucratic encounter while also attempting to increase the likelihood that they will be able to successfully accomplish the goal of the interaction. These behavioral dimensions and types of people play an important role in understanding how individuals interact with the state. At the same time, However, one of the main arguments of this chapter is that their work fails to adequately incorporate the experiences of marginalized people, who can have drastically different experiences from their normative counterparts. In the next section, I extend this work by discussing the roles of passing and legibility within coping.

Passing, Legibility, and Coping

Because street-level bureaucrats engage in sorting and categorizing people (e.g., Nisar and Masood 2019; Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003), bodies that are the most legible to the average bureaucrat create the least friction. By legibility, I mean the level to which bodies adhere to normative beliefs about how people should look, act, and speak. The more visually aligned an individual is with the picture of the normalized sexual citizen that a frontline worker has in their

head, the more easily interpretable they are through categories of race and gender. As Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003) write, "workers first make judgments about the citizen-client and then turn to policy to help enact or, if negative, to rationalize their judgments" (18). The more legible a person is, the more easily a frontline worker can decide what actions need to be taken. In the example from the beginning of this chapter, the woman at the DMV saw a body in front of her that was legible as a man, and thus the paperwork should be updated to reflect that. It's also important to note that not only did she see a man; she saw a white, seemingly middleclass, employed man, who was excessively deferent to her. While in that moment I was easily sortable, many trans gender and nonbinary people are often not, and thus have an additional burden to cope with that cis people do not. One way to ease this burden is to pass.

Chapter One of this dissertation outlines the historical archetype of trans people as frauds. That archetype is what solidified trans people's social construction (Schneider and Ingram 1993) as liars and deviants. Growing out of this archetype and social construction came the need to "pass," or to conceal one's transgender identity to avoid stigma and violence at the hands of both individuals and the state. While scholars generally agree that passing refers to aligning one's visual presentation with normative representations of being a man or a woman, Billard (2019) points out that there is debate about what passing represents; it can be seen "as rejection of socially imposed identities and the construction of new ones through performance" but also as a "more utilitarian function, namely to ensure survival of the one who passes" (Billard 2019, 1). Through the lens of the coping literature, passing is best viewed as a survival technique. During citizen-state interactions, trans and gender non-normative people may employ different ways of passing to minimize accusations of fraud or instances of violence.

Passing, however, does not guarantee safety. First, not everyone can pass, especially given that there is no one way to be a man or woman. American ideals of male and female are tied to

whiteness; this racialized notion of sex means that People of Color may often have greater struggle passing (Bettcher 2008; Snorton 2008). One result born from trans people's struggles to pass is that "the customary narrative of transgender life recasts the act of passing as deception, dishonesty and fraud" (Halberstam 2000, 62). And yet, passing can also be seen as necessary to access benefits from the state. Without passing, trans people become illegible and uncategorizable, or as Spade (2015) states,

> Trans people are told by the law, state agencies, private discriminators, and our families that we are impossible people who cannot exist, cannot be seen, cannot be classified, and cannot fit anywhere (27).

Through this lens, passing can be viewed as a coping mechanism by which trans people make themselves legible to the state. By doing so, frontline workers can check one of the required binary sex boxes, male or female, and the trans applicant is, for at least a moment, legible. This momentary legibility allows applicants to at least continue their application, although it does not guarantee that it will be accepted. Passing successfully (or "going stealth"; Beauchamp 2019) decreases the likelihood that applications will be subjected to overt transphobia or transphobic-related violence. While passing does not transform the gendered system that excludes trans people, it does create a way for trans people to participate in that system by being legible and categorizable, even if only briefly (Ozbilgin et al. 2023).

Impression Management and Goffman's Dramaturgic Analysis

Another way to more fully understand citizen coping is through the use of Goffman's impression management and dramaturgic analysis. Goffman first conceptualized his theory of impression management in his 1959 book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. In this seminal text, he argued that when interacting with others, an "individual will act in a thoroughly calculating manner, expressing himself in a given way solely in order to give the kind of impression to others that is likely to evoke from them a specific response he is concerned to obtain" (8). Goffman's

dramaturgic analysis offers useful metaphors of the "frontstage" and "backstage" that easily map onto citizen-state interactions and coping, as citizens change their public behavior in the presence of frontline workers. This calculated manner of expression makes up "impression management" (Goffman 1959, 122), or what Bozeman and Kacmar (1997) define as, "efforts by an actor to create, maintain, protect or otherwise alter an image held by a target audience" (qtd. in Bolino et al. 2008, 1080). In both *The Presentation of Self* and *Stigma* (Goffman 1963), Goffman views impression management as individual behavior fulfilling normative expectations to avoid stigma (Ozbilgin et al. 2023). Individuals will attempt to avoid stigma to degree that they can because it is discrediting. That is, stigmatized people are often seen as not worth believing simply because they belong to a stigmatized group.

Individual behavior is dependent on where interactions with others occur, either in the "frontstage" or "backstage" (Goffman 1959, 65). "Frontstage" behavior is "the performance of an individual in a front region may be seen as an effort to give the appearance that his activity in the region maintains and embodies certain standards." In contrast, in the "backstage," "suppressed facts make an appearance" (Goffman 1959, 68). Here, out of sight of the audience, individuals can let go of their performance. However, it's importance to note that frontstage behavior is not inherently deceitful. Rather, in the backstage, individuals are not tasked with meeting norms and expectations as they are in the frontstage. Examples of frontstage behavior include codeswitching, dressing in accordance with a dress code, or referring to strangers as "sir" or "ma'am." In these examples, the individuals partaking does so not to hide who they are, but because formal and social rules dictate them as necessity. Thus, it's not that frontstage coping behavior is behavior used to deceive frontline workers, but rather behavior that adheres to norms to render the citizen as worthy in the eyes of the bureaucrat they're interacting with.

Applying a Goffmanian Analysis to Coping with Bureaucratic Encounters

Goffman's dramaturgic analysis offers a lens through which to more deeply understand citizen coping behavior. In the frontstage, the behavior of individuals,

> may be seen as an effort to give the appearance that his activity in the region maintains and embodies certain standards. These standards seem to fall into two broad groupings. One grouping has to do with the way in which the performer treats the audience while engaged in talk with them or in gestural interchanges that are a substitute for talk… the other group of standards has to do with the way in which the performer comports himself while in visual or aural range of the audience but not necessarily engaged in talk with them (Goffman 1959, 65).

Applying these definitions to bureaucratic encounters, the first grouping covers the behavioral dimensions that Nielsen et al. define. While Goffman refers to the first grouping as "matters of politeness," a more exact definition might be interpersonal behaviors. These are the words and gestures that Nielsen et al.'s activists, accommodators, resisters, fighters, and cooperators engage in while navigating bureaucratic encounters. The second grouping, which Nielsen et al. do not address, encompasses the decisions of dress and speaking that clients make. This second dimension of the frontstage is where, I argue, unspoken normalizing behavior takes place. While I would argue that decisions of dress are backstage preparatory decisions, what is more important is to understand is the impact of these decisions. It's in deciding how to appear and speak while in the presence of frontline workers that citizen navigate being deemed "good," "bad," or "difficult" clients.

For trans people, this is where passing as well as other normalizing behavior belongs in here as well. Trans people, in all of their interactions with strangers, but especially when frontline workers, must take calculated risks of how to show up in public. As discussed in Chapter 1, trans people changed their behavior, dress, and voices to present themselves as normative sexual citizens. The overall feeling that participants voiced was that if they did not work to present themselves as cisgender, or at least in line with normative presentations of gender, that they would be marked as

bad clients, or even possibly fraudulent. Passing serves as both backstage and frontstage coping behavior (discussed next). For those whose intersecting identities prevent them from fully passing as normative sexual citizens, coping can also include adhering to other ideals of how non-normative bodies are expected to behave. Examples include disabled people portraying their disability in accordance with the medical model of disability to appear "disabled enough" (Lightman et al. 2009; Zaks 2023), homeless individuals withholding substance use histories to appear "deserving," (e.g., Mik-Meyer and Silverman 2019), or single parents risk having their children removed by the state refusing the let partners or family members live with them so as to appear "fit enough" (e.g., Roberts 1999; Dominelli et al. 2011).

The "Backstage": Preparation

The backstage is the region where "the performer can reliably expect that no member of the audience will intrude" (Goffman 1959, 69). While Goffman conceptualizes the backstage as being close to or directly adjacent to the front stage (he uses the example of employee-only sections of a hotel), in the context of citizen coping, the backstage is any place where individuals know they will not have an encounter with the State. Thus, the backstage for coping may be the frontstage for other types of encounters unrelated to citizen-state interactions. It's here that individuals engage in preparatory behaviors to be deemed worthy of services. This is where people engage in the information seeking and relying on support systems that Nielsen et al. discuss. It is also where individuals navigate learning costs such as figuring out if they are eligible for a program, compliance costs such as gathering required paperwork, and psychological costs of anticipated stigma. In discussing the backstage, it is important to reiterate that I am referring to the backstage to client-initiated encounters previously discussed, since individuals often do not have the power to keep their backstage regions free of intrusion during bureaucrat-initiated encounters such as police stops or unannounced welfare checks.

The "Frontstage": Citizen-State Interactions

Preparation that occurs in the backstage leads to the active impression management of the frontstage. To Goffman, the frontstage is the public places where individuals have an audience and understand that they are being watched (Goffman 1959). It is in the frontstage that individuals engage in "impression management"—acting in accordance with institutionalized norms. Viewing coping behavior as frontstage performance is where individuals act "as a character" (to use Goffman's language; 1959, 180) in the presence of street-level workers. Using the metaphor of the frontstage in tandem with Nielsen et al., we can view activists, accommodators, resisters, fighters, and cooperators as five different character types who perform varying degrees of the seven during-encounter behavioral dimensions the authors outline. Mik-Meyers and Silverman's (2019) work also offers an example where Goffman's metaphor fits well to describe coping. They state,

> when clients are given/take the role of citizens, they are expected to take action, show responsibility and demonstrate agency… When they are given/take the role of clients they are expected to accept an asymmetrical, dependent and often also passive relation to staff without demonstrating agency (1642).

Mik-Meyers and Silverman find three types of clients/characters: the resolute, the acquiescent, and the passive, each of whom fits into their character based on how they act in the presence of frontline workers. Both Neilsen et al. and Mik-Meyers and Silverman's characters engage in frontstage impression management; they "create, maintain, protect, or alter their image in the eyes of others" (Bolino et al. 2008, 1080). The actions individuals engage in are the same, whether we call it "coping" or "impression management." In either case, individuals tailor their public image and behavior in accordance with dominant norms to achieve an outcome that they perceive would not be possible without performance.

Methods

This paper utilizes data drawn from the qualitative phase discussed in the previous chapter. As part of the broader project, I first surveyed 465 non-cisgender adults living in the US who considered applying or applied for SNAP, Medicaid, and/or Unemployment insurance (discussed more in depth in Chapter 1). I then interviewed a subset of 43 participants between December 2023 and February 2024 who consented for follow-up. Like Barnes and Henly (2018), my goal was not to create a representative sample, but instead to speak with a diverse array of my survey participants based on demographics and program involvement. My semi-structured interview protocol asked participants to follow up on answers they had given in the survey (with my prompting participants what they had previously chosen), as well as for more detail on application experiences, experiences interacting with program staff, and thoughts about interacting with government workers as a trans person.

Sampling Strategy

I recruited survey participants using a purposive, snowball sampling strategy (Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim 2016b; Creswell 2013). Purposive sampling, also called judgement sampling, is a non-probability sampling technique where participants are chosen based on specific defined characteristics, in this case, non-cisgender adults living in the US who had considered applying or applied for SNAP, Medicaid, and/or Unemployment. I originally recruited survey participants through a mix of social media, specifically Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn, and through contacting LGBTQ organizations directly (see Chapter 1 for a more detailed discussion of the sampling strategy for the full dissertation). I began recruitment with 10 "seeds," individuals who I knew personally that met the study's eligibility criteria and were well connected to other non-cisgender people. After each of the seeds took my survey, they then referred others they knew to the

study's website to receive a survey link. Of the 465 survey respondents, 365 consented for follow up. To select interview participants, I used a version of quota sampling, where I recruited individuals to maintain the distribution of program participation (considered or applied) and demographics of the original sample. See Appendix A for the characteristics of the sample.

Unlike convenience sampling, which focuses on generalizability, in purposive samples, participants are selected "based on study purpose with the expectation that each participant will provide unique and rich information of value to the study" (Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim 2016, 4). Where increased sample size equates increased power in convenience sampling, in purposive sampling, the sample is considered sufficient once saturation occurs. Guest et al (2006) refers to saturation as, "the gold standard by which purposive sample sizes are determined in health sciences research" (60; qtd in Saunders et al. 2018, 1894). Saunders et al. (2018) identify four types of saturation, theoretical, inductive thematic, a priori thematic, and data. Each differs by the stage of focus—data collection, sampling, or analysis—and it is up to the researcher to choose the type of saturation to aim for. For this paper, I focused on data saturation; I stopped interviewing new subjects once I began to hear similar themes repeated with no new additional ones added.

Procedures & Interview Schedule

Utilizing an open-ended semi-structured interview protocol, I conducted all 43 interviews via Zoom between December 2023 and February 2024. The University of Washington's Human Subjects Division approved this study. I obtained informed consent from each participant to record the interview using Zoom's internal recording function, deleting the resulting video files and keeping the audio files. The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, on average, and each participant received a $75 digital gift card at the conclusion of the interview. Each interview was transcribed, and I wrote field notes after each interview and memos throughout the data collection phase.

Analysis

For my analysis, I took an abductive approach, which focuses on "cultivation of anomalous and surprising empirical findings against a background of multiple existing sociological theories and through systematic methodological analysis" (Timmermans and Tavory 2012, 169). Unlike purely inductive analysis, abduction allows the researcher to utilize their deep theoretical knowledge while staying open to surprises. Or, as Dey (1993) quips "there is a difference between an open mind and an empty head" (65). I uploaded and coded all transcripts in atlas.TI 24 and wrote all field notes and memos within the program. While the literature on administrative burden, passing, and citizen coping behavior informed my findings, the abductive approach also allowed for emergent concepts and surprises. I first analyzed my transcripts applying a mix of deductive a priori codes, descriptive coding, and in vivo coding (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña 2020). The a priori codes came from the literatures I was drawing on (e.g. administrative burden and passing). In descriptive coding, which is where the researcher "assigns a label to data that summarize in a word or short phrase...[which] eventually provide an inventory of topics for indexing and categorizing" (Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña 2020, 65), I applied phrases that emerged while I read each transcript. For in vivo coding, I used short phrases directly from participants' own language.

Findings

Getting Ready Backstage- Preparing for Interactions

As previously discussed, both Goffman (1959) and Nielsen et al. (2021) chart citizen's activities that occur backstage. Where Goffman speaks of the backstage region as being "defined as a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course" (68), Nielsen et al. frame the backstage as two separate behavioral dimensions—information seeking and finding support from others. In the

context of interview participants, the backstage is both—it is any physical space where they do not have to adhere to the required norms of citizen-state interactions, but also behaviors that occur in preparation for citizen-state interaction. Participants discussed both information gathering or seeking support, but more so in reference to overcoming learning costs and less in reference to preparing for interacting with a frontline worker. For example, when asked "how did you learn about what steps you needed to take to apply to the program(s) you applied to?" most interview participants said they simply "Googled it." Others discussed asking friends they knew who had previously applied how they navigated the application process, but far fewer respondents said they had any outside help. Even amongst those that received help and/or support from others spoke about that support in terms of easing the application. This showed up most frequently as filling out forms with the help of another person. Instead, participants' answers about preparing for interactions divided along two major themes: mentally preparing for bad experiences, and dressing in a certain way, specifically to interact with a frontline worker. Table 6 below summarizes the preparatory strategies and associated behaviors participants engaged in in the backstage.

Preparatory Strategy	Participant Behaviors
Mentally Preparing	
Preparing for mistreatment	Expecting to be spoken to rudely, disregarded, or misgendered; feeling scared or nervous about interacting with frontline workers
Preparing for accusations of fraud	Worrying about accusations of fraud due to mismatched IDs, overall appearance, or voice; fearing service denial or arrest
Dressing the Part	Dressing in a manner to appear more professional, more binarily gendered, or to blend in based on regional norms.

Table 6: Participant Preparatory Behavior

Mentally Preparing

The first preparation-related theme that emerged from interviews was the idea that participants had to mentally ready themselves to interact with street-level bureaucrats. Some of the preparation fell along previous findings: participants knew that navigating rules, bringing required

documentation, and having to wait extended amounts of time are simply requirements of citizen-state interactions (Auyero 2011; Moynihan, Herd, and Harvey 2015). However, most of the mental preparation was trans-specific (as discussed previously); interview participants discussed how they prepared for issues that could arise specifically because they were trans. Generally, participants prepared themselves for interrelated negative interactions: being deadnamed and misgendered, being mistreated because they were trans, and being accused of fraud.

Participants spoke most frequently about having to mentally prepare to be deadnamed and/or misgendered. While participants who had not updated their documents or failed to pass most often spoke of this fear, participants across the board voiced that they would mentally steel themselves for this behavior. For example, Jenna, a trans woman who had previously started hormones but had to stop because she could not find a prescribing doctor in her home state discussed having to "get used to" being called by her deadname:

> it was definitely be prepared because they're going to have to call you by [your deadname] and by these prefixes [sir or ma'am]… you kind of have to just sit there and take it unless you provide some kind of paperwork to prove them. Otherwise, they're just going to keep calling you that.

Preparing for misgendering or deadnaming was common amongst participants, regardless of gender identity. Bobby, a trans man who had medically transitioned and updated all of his IDs, spoke of always expecting he'd get misgendered over the phone, because "even though I'm on hormones, I'm sometimes misgendered." Because he could not predict when it would happen, he came to always assume that would happen during phone interactions as a defensive mechanism. Slava, another trans man I spoke with viewed deadnaming and misgendering as a compliance cost—a rule or procedure that had to be followed in order to access a service (Herd, Moynihan, and Harvey 2015)— of SNAP. Since he had not started a medical transition and was read as female, he said that from the beginning of the application process:

> I was just ready to be deadnamed and misgendered constantly so that way I could receive benefits… I knew it was going to be uncomfortable, but I knew that it wasn't going to impact the decision [to apply for SNAP]. I deadnamed myself until my documents matched.

In Slava's case, viewing misgendering this way and simply accepting it as the norm made it easier to withstand; it became a requirement of the application, but was less onerous than going without benefits. Although Slava was a trans man, his experiences mirror what many nonbinary people said. They expected to be misgendered because many frontline workers had no idea that they were nonbinary, or in some cases, did not understand what an X marker on an ID meant.

Preparing for Mistreatment

Participants also spoke at length of fear and having to mentally prepare to be mistreated. This could include being treated rudely, getting marked as a "difficult client" or having a frontline worker not fulfill their duties properly. For many, this mental preparation and fear was the result of previous bad experiences. For example, for Jun, a South Korean nonbinary person living in the US, fear of mistreatment was exacerbated by being an immigrant:

> I think part of me expects the worst as well, because from my experience, government workers here in America compared to South Korea, they're really not nice and they always look like they're so sick of it. And from my experience, I'm not sure if this is because I'm a foreigner, but I had this impression that they're meaner to me because I'm a foreigner, especially an Asian. So I would have that expectation, but to be prepared basically.

Jun often could not differentiate if the mistreatment they expected was mostly because they were "a foreigner" or because they were nonbinary but spoke of instances where a SNAP caseworker would become awkward when they realized that Jun wasn't a man. The result of these compounding mistreatments meant they found themselves mentally preparing for mistreatment either way.

Sarah, a trans woman, also prepared for mistreatment, because she did not know the correct way to show up in a Medicaid office:

> I'm just a little bit scared, intimidated. I don't know if I should be acting more towards my assigned sex at birth or if I should be more feminine and more like myself. I'm not sure what the right answer is…I don't know who to be or how to act or how to feel. All I know is that

> there's just that imminent danger… they could put you in jail or they could turn you away. I can't be turned away from [receiving Medicaid].

Like Jun, Sarah understood that frontline workers have discretion to turn people away. At 19, she also had very little previous experience interacting with bureaucrats, which produced a lot of uncertainty. She was also on her own for the first time, and voiced fears of losing her Medicaid, which was the only way she would be able to afford hormones. For both Sarah and Jun, any mistreatment they would experience at the hands of frontline workers was directly linked to being not cisgender. This was in addition to intersecting identities they both held; Jun as a South Korean "foreigner" and Sarah as a Latina living in the South.

Preparing for and Fearing Accusations of Fraud

Jenna, who previously discussed her preparation for misgendering, also discussed how she often had to mentally prepare herself for the fear she felt when she showed her driver's license to people. She had taken a new photo, but she had not changed her name or gender marker because she couldn't afford to:

> [I feel] fear because when I present the ID, the picture is me the way I present now, but when they see the name and they see the gender, they're just like, what? And sometimes even people will look at my ID and then look at me and then be like, this isn't you, this, you bring back your real ID or don't come back.

Jenna had been able to afford to change her license photo, but could not afford a name change, and did not want to update her gender marker until she had a more feminine sounding legal name. Many participants who had yet to update their name or gender marker on their IDs cited wanting to "do it all in one go;" they would wait to update their gender marker only after a name change came through as a way of reducing burdens. However, because name change costs are prohibitively high, costing on average more than $250 dollars (James et al. 2016), people like Jenna were stuck in a limbo that opened them to accusations of fraud.

Rebecca, another trans woman, had updated her document, but was sometimes read as a man. At the time of the interview, she was living in New York City, but had an out of state driver's license, which compounded her mentally preparing to be accused of fraud:

> My anxiety is like, "oh, they're going to clock me as male, but it's going to say F on [my license] and they're going to be like, 'this is a fake ID. You're not even from New York City, so why should I believe this is real in the first place?'" It's like I just have a general fear that people are going to be like, "this isn't you, so this must be a fake ID."

Rebecca's anxiety illustrates that for trans people who do not always pass, official documents do not necessarily legitimize their gender in the eyes of others. While Jenna's documents did not match her more feminized appearance, Rebecca's did. And yet, Rebecca still prepared herself to be accused of fraud. While I conducted these interviews in late 2023 and early 2024, the fears of fraud were not unfounded. In January 2024, the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles issued a letter banning gender marker changes on licenses and stated that "misrepresenting one's gender [or] understood sex on a driver's license constitutes fraud" (Yurcaba 2024). A year later in January 2025, Florida cancelled the driver's license of a nonbinary person who shared on TikTok that they had successfully changed the gender marker on their license (Bickerton 2025).

Dressing the part

In addition to mentally preparing for citizen-state interaction, many participants discussed preparing by dressing a certain way, whether it was to appear more binarily gendered, to appear more "professional," or to blend in. Dressing the part blurs the lines between preparation and during-interaction behavior. However, I argue that it is a preparatory behavior; we get dressed backstage in our homes and base our clothing selections on where we are going and what we are doing. For trans and non-cisgender people, choices about clothing can be extremely context dependent, or based on "region" (Goffman 1959). Many participants discussed choosing how to dress based on both region and who they'd have to interact with. Because interactions with frontline

workers were often viewed as extremely high stakes participants regularly spoke of dressing and acting completely differently in the presence of frontline workers than they otherwise would.

Extending Goffman's idea of region to the welfare offices, we can see how frontstage behavior, dress and professionalism have intertwined with how people, particularly women, show up in welfare offices and court rooms for years. Cummins and Blum (2015) argue that the upward mobility of women in the corporate world in the 1970s helped create the concept of "dressing for success," bolstered by John Molloy's 1977 bestseller, *The Woman's Dress for Success Book*. Nearly fifty years later, ideas about professional dress for, from neutral-colored suits to wearing make-up still remain in both the corporate world, but also in government offices. Many participants spoke of adhering to these norms when meeting with caseworkers. Jessica, a transwoman, spoke about how when she went to the unemployment office, she'd make sure to dress "professionally" to be seen as motivated to find work. When pressed about what she meant by professional, she said she would "just [dress] in the simplest way of like, a nice blouse and a skirt. Like just like, traditionally, you know, feminine clothing." To Jessica, professionalism was tied to a binary idea of femininity. To her, even if she did not pass all the time, she hoped that by adhering to binarily-gendered ideas of professionalism she would be taken seriously by her caseworker.

Em, a nonbinary person living in a rural area saw dress as a way of blending in. They normally would wear bold colors and dress androgynously but would "dress way down" when they had to interact with caseworkers or judges. They said,

> When I go anywhere, like in person, like a court house, or to go apply for SNAP, or if I have to interact with the police or even my child's school, I definitely dress like way down and just kind of make myself look a lot more plain, so that I'm not looked at... in court, usually you don't have to dress very formally in my area. Most people don't. And so I don't like to either. Because that's another thing that they'll do is if you look too nice, like if you go in for like a traffic ticket or something, and you look too nice. They'll still make you pay it because they think you have the money for it. So I try and dress very middle of the road.

For Em, who was read as a woman, dressing "plainly" meant dressing like the women in their area, mostly jeans, t-shirts, and hoodies, but also meant adhering to local norms so as not to look "too nice." They also spoke about taking up as little space as possible in government offices, to the point of almost being unnoticeable. For them, passing as a binary gender was deeply intertwined with local ideas of who women should show up in public. While this behavior could qualify as "capitulation" (Braithwaite et al. 2007; Nielsen et al. 2021), I think it's more aptly discussed in the context of gendered norms. In public, Em performs the role of a woman; they have a child who they take care of, they adhere to local ideas of dress, and they voiced worrying about how their behavior might be viewed "as a mother." It's not that Em did nothing or was completely passive—how capitulation is described. Instead, they actively engaged in "civil inattention" (Goffman 1971); they acknowledged strangers and others as they navigated waiting rooms and courtrooms, but avoided any unnecessary interactions that could draw attention to themselves.

Mikey, a nonbinary person and SNAP applicant, didn't feel the need to show up professionally as much as they felt the need to "present as male as possible." For them, that meant, "your standard t-shirt and jeans, no make-up, no jewelry." Jessica, Em, and Mikey's choices of dress all illustrate how complying with binary norms of dress becomes a large part of preparing for citizen-state interactions for non-cisgender people. While each person took a slightly different approach based in part on the norms of where they lived, they are united in that they explicitly changed how they dress in their regular daily lives. This preparatory behavior exemplifies how for trans people, adhering to norms is both a coping mechanism but also becomes a compliance cost of citizen-state interaction.

"Performing" Gender on Stage: Coping During Citizen-State Interactions

Gendered compliance costs continue from backstage preparation to frontstage interactions. Preparation, while necessary for trans people to interact with frontline workers, is not sufficient to guarantee a burdenless experience. Once in the offices or on the phone with government workers, participants discussed the lengths they would go to cope with their interactions. These frontstage behaviors align more with Goffman's dramaturgical metaphors and less with the seven behavior dimensions that Nielsen et al. outline. Specifically, the two main coping behaviors that trans people employ, passing as the sex marker on their IDs and adhering to stereotypical gender norms, can be characterized as normalizing behavior, or playing the role expected of clients. This coping behavior is about managing identities as non-normative sexual citizens in the face of frontline workers, and arguably comes before any of the coping behaviors outlined by Nielsen et al. That is, before trans and non-cisgender people can engage in (for example) challenging behavior or game playing, they first engage in behavior that aligns with Goffman's two groupings of frontstage behavior. I find that trans people's frontstage behavior generally falls into two intertwined dramaturgical behaviors. Trans people must "remember one's part" through adhering to the sex marker on their IDs regardless of their actual identity and must cover up "inappropriate behavior" by adhering to gender norms (Browning and Stephens 2010). This type of "covering behavior" includes changing clothing, voice, and mannerisms to avoid harassment or discrimination (Sears et al. 2024), which I discuss in the next section. Table 7 outlines the frontstage strategies that participants relied on when interacting with frontline workers.

In-Person Coping Strategy	Participant Behaviors
"Remembering One's Part": IDs Most Often Dictate Gender, not Actual Identity	Not correcting people when deadnamed or misgendered; letting others make assumptions about their gender
"Covering Up Inappropriate Behavior": Adhering to Gender Norms & Stereotypes	Dressing, acting, and speaking in a manner stereotypically associated with binary concepts of male or female gender presentation

Table 7: Participant In-Person Coping Strategies

"Remembering One's Part": IDs Most Often Dictate Gender, not Actual Identity

The stigma that trans people prepare themselves for, whether it be misgendering and deadnaming, mistreatment, or accusation of fraud led many participants I interviewed to make concerted efforts to "pass" as whatever their ID says their sex is. For some, this meant dressing and speaking in accordance with their birth sex, while for others, it meant leaning into gendered norms of dress and demeanor of the gender they identify as (discussed more in the next section). Most times, this behavior was reserved only for citizen-state interactions and not other types of interaction. Participants knew street-level bureaucrats possessed high levels of discretion, and worried that if they didn't align themselves with the sex marker on their ID that they risked being denied the service they were applying for.

Seth, a trans man who applied for SNAP, talked about how pretending to be female was just something "you gotta do":

> [The SNAP interview] was over the phone and at that point I hadn't started taking testosterone, so I was just cosplaying as my female version of myself to make the process easier. It's never fun deadnaming myself and having to pretend to be someone I'm not, but it's also kind of just, you gotta do what you gotta do.

For Seth, "cosplaying," or dressing up at a character, became a ritual compliance cost if he had to interact with any SNAP caseworkers. Because he hadn't started taking testosterone, and thus

"sounded female," he didn't see any point in telling the frontline workers he spoke to that he was trans or used male pronouns.

Not correcting frontline workers played a large role in citizen-state interactions for the people I interviewed. For Dylan, a nonbinary person who was assigned female at birth, not correcting frontline workers meant letting them make assumptions about their gender. This entailed going along with whichever pronouns the worker used:

> I just don't correct [people]. Sometimes they think I'm a girl and sometimes they think I'm a boy and I just never correct. I just let them say whatever and then then eventually they look through my paperwork. If I'm on the phone, sometimes they'll think I'm a guy and then they are looking through my paperwork or whatever, and then they see F and then they're like, "oh my God, I'm so sorry, ma'am, blah, blah, blah." And I'm like, "whatever. I do not care. Please just give me some money." But I just never correct.

Like Seth, Dylan viewed "never correcting" people as a requirement. To them, what was more important was receiving benefits, since they were unemployed. Nearly everyone I spoke with who presented themselves as their birth sex spoke in similar terms. They saw no net positives for trying to use different pronouns or correct frontline workers. One SNAP applicant, who first tried to be addressed by correct pronouns eventually gave up because, "no matter how many times you tell the people to stop misgendering you they won't stop saying 'I'm sorry I'm misgendering you ma'am but please be reasonable and calm down and just let me speak.'" This type of callous dismissal from the frontline worker is an example of how burdens can become psychological violence, which I discuss in greater length in the next chapter.

"Covering Up Inappropriate Behavior": Adhering to Gender Norms & Stereotypes

For many, passing as the sex marker on an ID also meant adhering to strict gender norms of dress, voice, and behavior. For many queer participants, it also meant "acting straight," or not mentioning the gender of a partner. Two of the most salient examples are Megan and Kai from the previous chapter. Both had updated all of their IDs and passed at their gender identity. But both were also queer; Megan was a butch lesbian and Kai a queer man. When interacting with frontline

workers, however, both aligned their outward appearances and behavior with being stereotypically straight. Natalia, a trans woman who like Megan identified as a butch lesbian, said dressed more feminine when applying for SNAP:

> I will wear what I deem to be nicer clothes or more feminine clothes, but I would not wear a dress or a skirt into a government building. I'll wear a blousey shirt, something that opens up a bit, or just kind of a nice t-shirt or long sleeve.

Natalia's dressing in "more feminine clothes," despite passing illustrates how queer participants felt the need to adhere to both gender norms and stereotypes. She wanted to make sure she was seen as deserving, which like Megan's acting "demure" meant portraying a type of femininity that didn't align with her own.

Participants who weren't queer also felt a need to lean into gender norms and stereotypes. Ben, a trans man, discussed how he was often read as a gay man. In the presence of strangers, but particularly frontline workers, he would make a concerted effort to not be read as queer out of fear of harm:

> I figured out maybe a year ago that most people, including queer people, read me as a cis gay man. Knowing that information has changed the way that I move. So if I'm interacting with a government official, I will be acutely aware of how I'm standing. I just have a tendency to stand in a way that I think is based off of programming of growing up a girl. And that now gets read as me being gay, or if somebody is really good with their eyes, me being a trans person. And so I make a concerted effort to stand up tall and to have a slight flex in my arms or something to convey that, [in caveman voice] "me, man, please don't harm."

Ben's paying attention to his stance and flexing his arms might seem like tiny, almost invisible behaviors. But these seemingly trivial acts can add up, or as Goffman notes, that "performers commonly attempt to exert a kind of synecdochic responsibility, making sure that as many as possible of the minor events in the performance, however instrumentally inconsequential these events may be, will occur in such a way as to convey either no impression or an impression that is compatible and consistent with the over-all definition of the situation that is being fostered" (1959, 31). For Ben and other people with marginalized identities, these seemingly inconsequential

behaviors are anything but, and arguably a hallmark of coping. It might be agonizing over the right shirt to wear to court, making sure to speak in perfect English to a caseworker, or standing and speaking in ways that align oneself as a normative sexual citizen. Regardless, they have outsized importance and impacts on marginalized people, and lead to psychological costs, which I discuss next.

Costs of Coping

As more scholars study citizen coping and its effects, they should also focus on the costs of coping. While engaging in normalizing behaviors such as passing as one's sex marker and dressing in ways that may be stereotypically gendered are seen a necessary compliance costs, they are a psychological burden as well. In addition to the constant fear of mistreatment, service denial, and possible violence, participants who coped through passing discussed how they often felt dysphoric and like they had to "really suspend" who they were. Those who had to pass as their birth sex spoke about having to essentially reenter the closet. For example, when asked how it felt having to pretend to be female said, "at times it feels like I'm killing part of myself, or just part of me is dying and just breezing off into the wind. Maybe it is the core part of me that I'm just cutting out." When asked how passing as his birth sex made him feel, Slava said,

> It's definitely a dysphoric experience, having to be the person I was in a way forced to be for so many years. So that was definitely a dysphoric experience, but also frustrating because you gotta do what you gotta do, but it's also every single step of this process is already miserable. So, to deadname myself and present to be a version of myself [that I'm not] on top of all of that is not fun.

Participants also spoke about their community, knowing that they weren't alone in having to pass as a gender they didn't identify with. When I asked Em how they felt trading affirmation for safety, they answered,

> It's devastating. It makes me very sad. It makes me very emotional. It makes me think about all of the people in my area who have to live this way…it's devastating to see how afraid people are in my area to be themselves.

These psychological costs have tangible downstream impacts. Mikey spoke about how they felt that having to work to pass to access services "just takes all of my energy for anything else that I want to do that actually brings me joy sometimes because I'm so exhausted from being somebody I'm not." Here, Mikey had enough energy to pass as a man and navigate applying to SNAP, but not enough for anything else. While their "cognitive resources" (Christensen et al. 2020) were sufficient to navigate the burdens of the SNAP application, others I spoke with were not as fortunate, ultimately not applying because of the level of human capital required.

Discussion: A "New" Type of Coping: The Normalizers

The coping behaviors that trans and nonbinary people partake in, whether preparatory or acted upon during citizen-state interactions, all work to show frontline workers that trans people fit the mold of normative sexual citizens (as discussed in Chapter 1). In most cases, this is done through passing as cisgender but may also include other behavior to demonstrate adherence to expected norms. This type of behavior is not mutually exclusive from the behaviors Nielsen et al outline. Rather, this behavior, which I term "normalizing," work in conjunction with any of the nine behavioral dimensions they identify. Trans people may decide to be (for example) both normalizers, but also challengers, where they work to portray their identity as normative, but still remain resolute and challenge the authority of frontline workers (Mik-Meyer and Silverman 2019; Nielsen, Nielsen, and Bisgaard 2021). Thus, normalizers should be treated as their own category or dimension.

Take, for example, the practice of passing as one's birth sex, despite that not being a person's gender identity. This passing is not capitulation, nor is it challenging or game-playing, because the entire point of passing it to go unnoticed. At the same time, each of these behavioral dimensions share something with passing. Passing is resistance and accommodation; it is both "an agential power of affirming one's own reading of self" (Snorton 2008, 87) but also a aligning oneself

with prescriptive norms to be seen as worthy. Passing can require a high degree of preparation, both mentally and physically, and also no preparation at all in that so many trans people who choose to pass have grown accustomed to that preparation. It's a constant knowledge about danger— physical and otherwise— that comes from not being a normative sexual citizen. Passing is a type of assertive impression management, which Bolino et al. (2008) define as when individuals "proactively manage impressions about themselves, typically by means of enhancements, ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification" (1082).

Normalizers proactively manage their image by fitting the mold of the normative sexual citizen through dress, behavior, voice, or sharing information that aligns themselves with the values that frontline workers want to see. While the focus of this paper is how non-cisgender people engage in normalizing coping behavior, it's important to note that other types of people do as well. There is extensive research on how disabled people work to seem "disabled enough"(e.g., Lightman et al. 2009), homeless people seem deserving (e.g., Mik-Meyer and Silverman 2019), and parents, particularly mothers work to appear "fit enough" to maintain custody of their children (Dominelli et al. 2011). It's important to note that in these examples, individuals are normalizing their existences by fitting narratives of deservingness to access services.

Conclusion

In this chapter I seek to answer Nielsen et al.'s call to use their work as a "starting point to embark [on] a research agenda on citizen's coping behavior" (383). While the findings from this article expand the coping literature, there is much more to be done. Perhaps most importantly, the coping literature and PA literature in general needs to better address how intersecting identities, particularly intersecting nonnormative and marginalized identities experience compounding forms of oppression (Crenshaw 1989). While I center the experiences of trans people, I do not address in-depth the coping behaviors of People of Color, disabled people, or immigrants, all of whom may

employ normalizing behavior that is identity-specific (for example, see Carbado and Gulati 2013). While the goal of this research was specifically to describe the citizen-state experiences of trans and non-cisgender people, and interview participants did have intersecting identities including those just mentioned, future research on bureaucratic coping should focus on other marginalized communities.

I argue that Nielsen et al.'s model would be improved by adding another type of citizen—"normalizers"— or individuals that align themselves to meet standards of the normative sexual citizen discussed in the previous chapter. Normalizers who cannot fully be seen as normative sexual citizens (for example, certain disabled people) may engage in another type of normalizing behavior where they attempt to align themselves with the dominant narrative of their group. Continuing with the disability example, this may include behavior such as working to appear "disabled enough" in the eyes of bureaucrats or fitting the medical model of disability (Zaks 2023).

Additionally, Nielsen et al.'s study utilized a representative sample. However, previous work on street-level bureaucracy shows that "the poorer people are, the greater influence street-level bureaucrats have over them" (Lipsky 1980/2010, 6), and the more often they may face street-level bureaucrats who impose burdens on them (Olsen, Kyhse-Andersen, and Moynihan 2022). While Nielsen et al. identify their representative sample as a strength of their study, they do not address how marginalized communities are over-represented in citizen-state interactions. Thus, their coping typology does not necessarily account for how marginalized people manage their identities when interacting with the state.

Throughout this analysis, it needs to be clear that trans people are not being deceptive by not disclosing their identity to frontline workers. Rather, passing as cisgender, whether as one's birth sex or as the sex that aligns with their gender identity, is a type of impression management. As Bettcher (2008) puts it, "because of the systematic representational alignment between gender presentation and sexed body, transpeople are never allowed to be ourselves in the first place insofar as we are

fundamentally constructed as deceivers/pretenders" (55). Trans people are so aware of this construction and its stigmatization in the US, or as Goffman puts, "an attribute that is deeply discrediting" (Goffman 1963, 3), that they feel they are more likely to have a successful interaction with frontline workers if they do not disclose their identity. In the context of citizen-state interactions, that discrediting can mean denial of services, or being deemed "unworthy" or accused of fraud. In fact, trans people navigate fraud on two fronts. First is the fear of being accused of fraud when appearances do not match IDs adequately. The second is the deception that Bettcher is speaking of, where transness is seen as fundamentally fraudulent—trans people are simply "pretending" to be their gender identity. The other important point is that while Goffman refers to the interactions as "performance," that does not mean that gender is a costume concealing "real" identity. Rather, performance means calculated behavior in the presence of others through the demonstration of and adhering to expected norms. Additionally, as one participant aptly pointed out, "if I don't have to disclose this information, I'm not going to because it doesn't feel relevant."

Future research should focus on how normalizing behavior shows up for different groups and in different contexts. Does everyone who utilizes normalizing behavior prepare in advance? Are there correlations between certain types of normalizing behaviors and the nine behavioral dimensions that Nielsen et al. conceptualize? Answering these questions will help future understandings of how citizens with marginalized identities cope. Future research should focus on how people with intersecting marginalized identities, for example being disabled and a single mother, impact normalizing behavior.

Finally, I would argue that we as public administration scholars should look at passing not only as coping behavior, but also as a compliance cost for trans people. That is, for trans people, aligning with normative gender ideals is a necessity to access services. Doing so would allow the field in interrogate more deeply how the state requires people to adhere to dominant norms in the same

way that it requires people to complete certain tasks to gain access to programs and services. With this knowledge, we may better understand the normative sexual citizen's role in determining who overcomes burdens, and who is left out.

Chapter 3: Burdens, Governmentality, and Violence

Introduction

The previous two chapters offer empirical evidence of administrative burden's real-world for trans people in the US. This chapter builds on the previous two, asking, when, where and how do burdens become violent? I seek to answer this set of questions in three ways: first, I examine how the "policymaking by other means" (Herd and Moynihan 2018; Edelman 1985), now considered an integral element of burdens, can be used to target certain groups for violence through their constructed, distributive, and consequential nature. Second, I use the work of queer theorists such as Dean Spade and Paisley Currah to demonstrate how the nature of burdens perpetuates norms under the guise of neutral administrative practices. Ultimately, I argue that the most accurate way to view burdens that captures their capacity for violence is as a force of governmentality,

A Note on Violence

Before delving into the arguments of this chapter, I think it is useful to define and discuss violence. The World Health Organization's (WHO) "World Report on Health and Violence" defines violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation" (Rutherford et al., n.d.). While administrative burdens can produce physical violence (e.g. Nisar 2018), the focus of this chapter is on violence as the use of power against communities that result in psychological harm, deprivation, and death.

In the next section, I will discuss how policymaking by other means is wielded as a tool to explicitly inflict violence through administrative processes and bureaucratic discretion. I utilize Ray, Herd, and Moynihan's (2022) "Racialized Burdens," demonstrating how the structural nature of

post-Civil War anti-Black laws and policies caused a level of disenfranchisement of the Black community that is definitionally violent. Later in this chapter, I will use Dean Spade's (2015) "administrative violence" to illustrate how downstream effects of burdens become violence for trans people specifically through psychological and physical harm, and by impacting their life courses. Finally, I look at Foucault's concepts of governmentality and discipline, demonstrating how administrative burdens can "socially construct and designate certain bodies as transgressive or 'problem bodies,' and then work to deny, constrain, and remove those bodies from public space in order to mitigate the challenge that transgressive bodies pose to the hegemonic power structure and discourse" (Daum 2022, 14). Finally, I explore governmentality in practice by applying it to the SAVE Act, a bill that has been fast-tracked by Republicans in the US House of Representatives that would require Americans to provide their original birth certificate, a passport, or other federally issued identity document in order to register or reregister to vote (Morris and Henry 2025).

Policymaking by Other Means

A main component of administrative burdens is that they function as "policymaking by other means" (Herd and Moynihan 2018; Edelman 1985). Here, lawmakers change policies, rules, regulations, and norms change through avenues other than or in addition to overt policymaking. Burdens become especially useful

> in an age of fierce polarization when, absent unified political control, parties look to nonlegislative ways to make policy. Indeed, administrative burdens form part of the "hidden politics" that Jacob Hacker argues have characterized battles about the role of the state in recent decades, where big policy changes have been made largely out of public view and without large formal policy choices (Herd and Moynihan 2018, 35).

Couched as technical fixes without specific policy intent, policymakers often legitimize burdens under the guise of neutrality—they are created to serve values such as "fraud reduction," or "efficiency" (Edelman 1985; Herd and Moynihan 2018; Moynihan, Herd, and Ribgy 2016). However, underlying these public-facing values are often more politically motivated goals. A

policymaker not wanting to publicly state that they want to reduce the size of the state welfare roll may look to increase compliance burdens as means of "combating fraud and abuse," as then-Governor Scott Walker did in Wisconsin in 2011 (Moynihan, Herd, and Harvey 2015) and as the Trump administration is doing now. These types of burdens fall under what Peeters (2020) calls "formal and intentional" origins of burdens: "the deliberate and planned restriction or deterrence of access to rights and services through the design of bureaucratic procedures and access requirements" (Peeters 2020, 557). Often, these types of burdens are created by policymakers with ideological views and, according to Peeters, can be accomplished in two ways—through restricting access by increasing burdens (such as closing polling places in urban areas or requiring waiting periods before having an abortion), or through bureaucratic leeway, which enables barriers to be constructed at the street level (Peeters 2020). I also offer that formal and intentional burdens can open target populations up to vigilantism, as access requirements also divide populations in those granted access, and those denied (a dichotomy I will discuss later in this chapter). The result is that civilians who see themselves as "proper citizens" and rule followers feel the need to police the boundary between those granted access and those denied via burdens. Regardless of the avenue, all three methods have the capacity to inflict violence on the intended population.

Restricting Access

Increasing costs, particularly compliance costs, is one of the easiest ways to restrict access to programs. Waiting periods, excess paperwork, and other Kafkaesque rules can both dissuade program application as well as increase the likelihood of rejection due to mistakes. When burdens are incredibly onerous, prospective participants may give up because the hurdles are viewed as being just too high to be worth trying. As seen in Chapter 1, high costs can also increase fear of making mistakes and suffering consequences, leading to nonapplication. Complicated procedures also restrict access, as participants may complete steps incorrectly or not at all, leading to rejection.

Policymakers looking to restrict application and access can often rely on administrative processes rather than changing laws, which can be both illegal but also more likely to draw backlash from constituents paying attention to how their lawmakers vote.

This tactic of using burdens rather than overt policymaking is perhaps most easily illustrated by the State Department's use of a four-foot-long visa application form in 1943 (Wyman 2007). A seemingly banal administrative change—here the literal length of a form—made the process of immigrating to the United States more difficult than necessary to stymie the flow of immigrants, specifically Jews, into the country during WWII. The State Department increased a compliance cost through an absurdist measure that had a demonstrable impact; immigrants who could not navigate the four-foot-long barrier to entry were assumably turned away at the consulates at which they attempted to apply. However, while the administrative burdens literature ends the story there, we can see that it provides an example of when and how burdens are used as a tool for violence. Many of the Jews denied entry into the US during WWII died at the hands of the Nazis. Here, the use of the four-foot form falls into the WHO's definition of violence; nativist lawmakers used their power to change the visa application, which deprived immigrants of access, leading to their death. It is not the burden itself (here the form) that is violent, but the effects of the burden, which were very much intended.

While a four-foot-long form offers an example of indirect violence, policymakers can also inflict violence directly on their targeted population. We are seeing examples of this now, through the Trump administration's assertion that gender and sex are the same, and that they are determined at birth and unchangeable (The White House 2025). As a result of these directives, trans and nonbinary people are now unable to change the sex marker on their passports. Many participants who I interviewed for this dissertation told me that simply knowing that their IDs did not match their identity or for some, how they looked, caused humiliation and fear, mostly through anticipated

stigma. Here, the executive order and the cascading administrative changes that have resulted from it are an example of psychological violence through fear and humiliation. The language in the executive order exacerbates this violence, using phrases such as "biological truth" and "gender ideology extremism" (The White House 2025), phrases that are essentially meaningless by themselves, but in the context of the order further the social construction of trans people as fraudulent and even terroristic. The use of "extremism" is particularly violent. In a post 9/11 world, extremists are viewed as threats that must be dealt with, as they are inherently bad and seemingly everywhere, hiding in plain sight (Puar and Rai 2002). This opens trans people to additional violence through bureaucratic leeway and vigilantism.

Bureaucratic Leeway

While restricting access can be an incredibly effective way of inflicting violence, bureaucratic leeway offers another path, one which is harder to control, as frontline workers have large amounts of discretion. Safety-net programs such as SNAP, Medicaid, and Unemployment provide examples of how bureaucratic leeway changes policy outcomes. Lawmakers continue to focus on stringent eligibility and work requirements and fraud reduction, increasing administrative burdens to enrollment rather than focusing on increased take-up and retention (Wichowsky and Moynihan 2008; Brodkin 1987). Frontline workers then ultimately decide if applicants meet said eligibility requirements, bending the rules who those they deem worthy or denying those who they do not (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003; Schram et al. 2009). Because so many decisions are made at the street level, bureaucrats who share the same political or ideological views as the lawmakers increasing burdens may feel enabled to impose even more. This leads to greater variation in service delivery across jurisdictions and can lead to rationing of benefits (Brodkin 1987).

Bureaucratic leeway can also lead to violence, as frontline workers can wield their discretion and power to inflict psychological harm, mental anguish, humiliation, or feelings of being trapped.

This can show up as shaming a client for their choices, denying lived experiences or identity as real, or forcing a client into counseling despite not having a mental health issue. Multiple interview participants spoke about their experiences of psychological violence at the hands of frontline workers. As discussed in Chapter Two, for example, participants frequently dealt with intentional misgendering and deadnaming. This refusal to acknowledge people's identities is a prime example of when psychological costs become violence. Accidental deadnaming and misgendering lacks the intent required under the WHO's definition. However, it becomes violent when street-level bureaucrats use their discretion to humiliate and put clients "in their place."

Vigilantism

One major aspect of burdens is that they divide the population into various dichotomies such as those who are targets of burdens, and those who are not, those who are deserving of services, and those who are not, or those who can overcome burdens and those who cannot. Most of these dichotomies do not inspire outside interventions except among individuals and organizations working with the impacted population. For example, while there are organizations large and small working to decrease burdens associated with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), we do not hear about roving bands of individuals working to bar students and their parents from filling out these forms. However, when formal and intentional burdens are used to target groups with negative social constructions, those groups can be subjected to vigilantism, as civilians who see themselves as "proper citizens" and rule followers feel the need to police the boundary between those granted access and those denied via burdens. We see this occurring currently, as individuals police public restrooms and girls' sports teams, accusing girls and women, both cisgender and trans, of being in the wrong restroom or cheating.

Lawmakers across the country have introduced bathroom and sports bans targeting trans women, creating a chilling effect even in states where no bans have been introduced. As trans people

are increasingly having to navigate trans-specific administrative burdens (as discussed in Chapter 1), vigilante individuals have created chaos and violence against cisgender women as they take it upon themselves to "protect women." Whether or not this is an intended product of anti-trans policies, the fear of encountering one of these vigilantes impacts how trans people but also non-normative cisgender people show up in public.

The increased restriction on US asylum seekers has also sparked an increase in vigilantism. As compliance costs increase and pathways for immigration disappear, Americans, particularly in border states, have taken to impersonating Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents, wreaking havoc and violence on immigrant populations, regardless of their documentation status. In at least three states, police have arrested civilians who impersonated ICE, kidnapping, sexually assaulting, and humiliating Spanish speakers that they assumed to be undocumented (Moshtaghian, Pazmino, and Valencia 2025).

Both bathroom police and fake ICE agents become emboldened to take the law into their own hands when they feel that burdens aren't high enough to dissuade specific behaviors—in this case the existence of trans people in restrooms and immigrants residing in this country. This vigilantism is born from burdens and formal policies that work to divide the population into the deserving and undeserving. However, the current administrative burden literature does not adequately explain this behavior, which I argue is better understood through the lens of administrative violence.

Administrative Violence

In the previous section, I discussed how policymaking by other means can cause violence, specifically through restricting access, bureaucratic leeway, and vigilantism. However, the administrative burden literature falls short of linking the distributive nature of burdens to violence, especially against marginalized groups. In this next section, I expand on sites of state violence by

using Spade's (2015) concept of "administrative violence," the violence and harm that government systems, bureaucratic processes, and institutionalized norms create and perpetuate. I argue that violence emerges through seemingly neutral administrative processes and sorting practices, neither of which the administrative burden literature discusses at length. I then identify how these processes and related burdens can directly cause psychological and even physical violence for marginalized groups.

The concept of administrative violence, first coined by Dean Spade in his 2009 keynote address at Barnard College, merges how the state wields its power to sort and manage populations with its capacity to inflict psychological and physical violence, greatly impacting the lives of the marginalized. Per Spade (2015):

> "Administrative violence" draws attention to the way in which systems that organize our lives in seemingly ordinary ways—determining what ID we carry, what government records exist about us—produce and distribute life chances based on violent forms of categorization…critical movements have questioned the neutrality of those ways of knowing and the categories they produce, identifying white supremacist, ableist, colonial, and patriarchal norms. I am interested in paying attention to systems of explicit state violence, like criminal and immigration enforcement systems, as well as systems that many consider benign, such as those that determine and record the "facts" about people's births. Distinctions and norms produced by these systems assign categorizations such as gender and produce deadly consequences for those who fail to conform to their assigned category (24).

While administrative violence and administrative burden are not synonymous concepts, administrative violence extends the consequences of actions and policies that are often seen as neutral burdens. Where the administrative burden literature understands that IDs and eligibility requirements create learning, compliance and psychological costs (e.g. Herd and Moynihan 2024), administrative violence states that for some—particularly People of Color, transgender people, and low-income people—the costs are vastly more profound and even dire. For example, being white, straight, cisgender, and able-bodied (what I refer to as the normative sexual citizen in previous chapters) are labels and norms that are created and enforced by the state. Whiteness, in particular,

has historically been forcefully applied to Indigenous peoples through blood quantum ("Blood Quantum and Sovereignty: A Guide" 2022) and denied to Black people (such as in *Plessy vs. Ferguson*). Forcing whiteness as a label on Indigenous peoples denied rights that were guaranteed in treaties, while denying whiteness for mixed race people such as Homer Plessy established and then reified the "separate but equal" of Jim Crow-era America.

Per administrative violence, it is not necessary for there to be physical violence in the application of labels; violence also arises in how the label (or lack of label) impacts life outcomes for marginalized groups. The physical violence of forced removal of Indigenous peoples from their land was accompanied by the administrative violence of the blood quantum of the 19th and 20th centuries, the effects of which are still felt today. Administrative burden scholars would argue that the current administrative hurdles Native people must navigate to access benefits are a racialized burden (Ray, Herd, and Moynihan 2022), which is correct. However, by failing to extend the category of burdens into violence, the field misses how the government uses burdens to control and regulate populations in ways that have drastic impacts on life outcomes. For example, the post-COVID average life expectancy of Indigenous people in the US, particularly those living on reservations, is 65.2 years, which is 11.2 years less than non-Hispanic white people (Holland 2024).

Psychological Violence

While much of the focus of administrative violence is on the direct impact that sorting and labels have on the life courses of marginalized people, Spade also addresses the psychological and physical violence that later stems from these labels. All three types of burdens—learning, compliance, and psychological— can later produce psychological violence. However, because burdens can be so intertwined (e.g. insurmountable learning costs can produce compliance costs), I do not find utility is separating the three types out. Instead, I will discuss burdens broadly, demonstrating how they can inflict violence.

Within the administrative burden literature, psychological costs deprive people their sense of autonomy (Herd and Moynihan 2018; Auyero 2011), and produce stress and stigma (Lasky-Fink and Linos 2023). In many cases, the loss of autonomy comes more passively; policies force individuals to complete tasks that they find worthless, nonsensical, or demeaning. Stigma, while more actively experienced, is only discussed in the context of participating in negatively-viewed programs, rather than when belonging to a negatively-viewed identity group. It is at the nexus of identity and burdens that psychological violence occurs. Having one's identity denied as legitimate (e.g., trans people), lived experiences denied as real (e.g., victims of abuse), or outright humiliation, all can occur in welfare offices, courtrooms, and state-sanctions rehab facilities, along with other interactions with the state (e.g. see James et al. 2016).

Compliance costs can also inflict psychological violence. Costs become violence when burdens are intentionally wielded by street-level bureaucrats. In these cases, frontline workers utilize their discretion to "ensure that bodies that contest or problematize the definitions of normality are denied visibility, mobility, and access to the public spaces of society" (Nisar and Masood 2019, 10). More specifically, violence stems from frontline workers forcing clients against their will to do something. For example, sex-segregated homeless shelters and drug rehabs force trans and gender nonconforming people to dress according to their sex assigned at birth in order to access services (Spade 2006; Currah 2022). People charged with prostitution are forced into mandatory counseling (White et al. 2017). People who are disabled but not "disabled enough" are denied disability insurance (Lightman et al. 2009).

Physical Violence

While arguably less common, administrative burdens can result in physical violence. Immigrants who are unable to overcome the learning, compliance, and psychological costs of

applying for residency or citizenship face incarceration and deportation.[4] Low-income people with children who are unable to overcome the compliance costs required by social services face having their children forcibly removed (Schram et al. 2009). And trans people who cannot overcome the various administrative burdens of procuring correct identity documents face physical harm in the hands of cops, bureaucrats and members of the general population when their documents out them (James et al. 2016; White et al. 2017). Like psychological violence, physical violence as the result of burdens can produce distrust in government, and impact participation. For example, while not discussed at length in the previous chapters, a small subset of survey and interview participants spoke of experiencing physical violence at the hands of frontline workers and tied those experiences to their current trepidation about interacting with the government.

Physical violence can also be a by-product of burdens, as seen in the vigilantism discussed in the previous section. Here, the violence does not directly or immediately come from the hands of state. In the case of vigilantism, private citizens feel compelled to direct violence against those who have been labeled as a dangerous "other." Undocumented (or perceived to be undocumented) people or trans and gender-nonconforming people have been particularly targeted since the 2024 presidential election. Both populations have been targeted with massive administrative burdens regarding legal status and documentation. Opponents of these two groups have also used increasingly derogatory labels when discussing both trans people and undocumented people, which can increase psychological costs and inspire vigilantism.

[4] I categorize deportation and incarceration as physical violence for a few reasons. Both deportation and incarceration involve restriction of movement. They are also sites of physical violence such as beatings and sexual assault. Both are also born out of the violence of colonialism and forcibly moving/removing bodies based on who is a citizen and who is other. Lastly, both can involve being physically removed from a person's home against their will.

Labels & Norms

Administrative violence both perpetuates labels and norms but also is often a result of them as well. Administrative systems do more than simply sort and manage people based on already existing traits. These systems also classify people, which "invent and produce meaning for the categories they administer, and those categories manage both the population and the distribution of security and vulnerability" (Spade 2015, 11). In many ways, labels like "white," "gay," and even "citizen," have only theoretical meaning until they are applied in such a way as to establish the lines of not white, not gay, and not a citizen. In attaching these labels to groups of people, especially when doing so controls access, the state invents these classifications while simultaneously claiming that it is simply sorting along "naturally" occurring lines. As Currah (2022) notes,

> The arbitrary and conventional character of language in general and classifications in particular can be properly described as violent—in the sense of creating meaning and imposing order by cutting one thing off from another, by foreclosing the possibility of other combinations of things (97).

To once again use undocumented people as an example, the classification of "undocumented" produces violence. It does so not only by limiting access to services that provide material benefit (such as SNAP, Section 8, etc.), but also by imposing labels that signify deservingness and in the worst cases, inspire physical violence. When labels intersect with racialized and gendered norms, violence can compound, as intersecting marginalized identities are viewed as more deserving of it. Melamed (2011) while racial animus continues to fuel violence,

> We [also] have an intensification of normative and rationalizing modes of violence, which work by ascribing norms of legibility/illegibility and mandating punishment, abandonment, or disposability for norm violators (10).

Ascribing labels to groups also impacts the degree of burdens they will face, and groups who are seen as less deserving face popular support for increasing costs against them (Johnson and Kroll 2020).

Sources of Violence

In the previous section, I link Dean Spade's concept of administrative violence with the administrative burden literature. In this following section, I take a deeper look at two sources of violence. First, I use Ray, Herd, and Moynihan's (2023) "racialized burdens" as an example of how burdens create and perpetuate violence against People of Color, specifically Black people. Second, I look at how bureaucratic discretion is often a source of violence, both overtly through psychological violence and more surreptitiously through the enforcement of norms.

Racialized Burdens as Administrative Violence

Administrative burden literature, while citing historical discrimination against communities of color, has only begun to delve into the deep institutionalized racism that is often the root cause of the disproportionality of burdens falling on these communities. Ray, Herd, and Moynihan (2023) offer the first deep investigation of institutionalized racism through their framework of "racialized burdens." In this framework, learning, compliance, and psychological costs are wielded by the state to perpetuate and reinforce racial inequality, which are normalized in public services. The authors argue that "racialized burdens shape access to resources in ways that disadvantage minorities" (141), but do not go as far to say if/when these disadvantages equate to violence. I argue, however, that the examples they use throughout the paper demonstrate how racialized burdens are tools of government that continue the lineage of racialized violence in this country.

The concept of racialized burdens is built on Ray's concept of "racialized organizations theory" (Ray 2019). In this theory, he outlines four tenets of how racialized structures operate:

> (1) racialized organizations enhance or diminish the agency of racial groups; (2) racialized organizations legitimate the unequal distribution of resources; (3) Whiteness is a credential; and (4) the decoupling of formal rules from organizational practice is often racialized (Ray 2019 qtd in Ray, Herd, and Moynihan 2023, 140).

These tenets are important, but there is greater benefit in understanding how they are sources of violence, rather than simply burdens. First, all four tenets rely on organizations utilizing their power to impact outcomes for People of Color, and for Black people in particular. Going back to the WHO's definition of violence, in each of these tenets power is wielded to cause and perpetuate harm and deprivation. That harm can be direct, such as diminishing and, in some cases, removing the agency of People of Color, or more indirect, such as causing the unequal distribution of resources, resulting in downstream effects. These downstream effects, such as differences in access to education and generational wealth, serve as examples of administrative violence, as they impact life outcomes. For instance, the Black-white wealth gap leads not only to issues of housing and mobility, but also health outcomes over the life course (Boen, Keister, and Aronson 2020). Interestingly, the authors even refer to burdens being used as "racialized weapons" (143), but do not concede that these burdens are violent.

Racialized burdens also perpetuate violence through norms. Whiteness remains the conferrer of deservingness and access (Harris 1993), both formally through laws and policies and informally through policy implementation and bureaucratic discretion. As discussed in Chapter 1, the image of the normative sexual citizen—white, straight, cisgender, and able-bodied, renders people who are lack those traits as "other." These norms in turn are used by policymakers to create additional burdens for marginalized groups, and by frontline workers to sanction behavior that they deem as abnormal. In the case of the latter, norms function as a "disciplinary mode of power" (Foucault 1995). As Spade (2015) notes,

> The disciplinary mode of power establishes norms for being a proper productive citizen, worker, adult, man, woman, or student that are enforced on individuals while the population-management mode of power mobilizes those standards and meanings to create policies and programs that apply generally (Spade 2015, 58).

In this case, racialized burdens function as a disciplinary power, forcing people of color to align themselves with normative sexual citizenship so as to be viewed as "proper" citizens deserving of

services. This forced alignment, discussed in Chapter 2, is a compliance cost that reifies whiteness as the norm to gauge deservingness against, "demonstrating how administrative obstacles function as their own set of politics, working behind the scenes under the guise of rules and regulations" (Moynihan, Herd, and Harvey 2015).

Ray et al. share an anecdote from Tressie McMillan Cottom's *Thick* as an example of racialized burdens and how bureaucratic discretion "can further entrench racial inequalities, in part by enhancing whiteness as a credential" (Ray, Herd, and Moynihan 2023, 147). In the story, McMillan Cottom shares,

> My grandmother and mother had a particular set of social resources that helped us navigate mostly white bureaucracies to our benefit. We could, as my grandfather would say, talk like white folks. We loaned that privilege out a lot. I remember my mother taking a next-door neighbor down to the social service agency. The elderly woman had been denied benefits to care for the granddaughter she was raising. Her denial had come in the genteel bureaucratic way—lots of waiting, forms, and deadlines she could not quite navigate… It took half a day, but something about my mother's performance of respectable black person—her Queen's English, her *Mahogany* outfit, her straight bob and pearl earrings—got done what the elderly lady next door had not been able to get done in over a year. I learned, watching my mother, that there was a price we had to pay to signal to gatekeepers that we were worthy of engaging (McMillan Cottom 2019, 162-163).

Ray et al. argue that this forced alignment with whiteness as a prime example of how bureaucrats will often sanction Black clients and give white clients the benefit of the doubt (Schram et al. 2009). However, I argue that this story is a prime example of administrative violence and disciplinary power. First, the neighbor struggled for over a year taking care of her granddaughter, arguably suffering material hardship as a result of being denied benefits. She also likely felt a lack of power if not a sense of humiliation in the hands of white bureaucrats. McMillan Cottom's mother, who performed the role of "respectable Black person," also arguably experienced a type of violence associated with having to align oneself with normalized sexual citizenship. Doing so reifies that when an individual is not fully a normative sexual citizen, that is, that one or more aspects of their identity deviate from the full list of traits of the normative sexual citizen, that they cannot show up

as themselves and be considered worthy. This is echoed in Chapter 2's findings, where participants discussed the psychological exhaustion and turmoil of having to pass as cisgender to receive benefits. McMillan Cottom's story also demonstrates how the state perpetuates violence through frontline worker discretion and moral policing, discussed in the next section.

Bureaucratic Discretion, Moral Policing, and Violence

Street-level bureaucratic discretion leads to uneven and inequitable implementation of laws and policies and is one of the reasons that burdens are distributive in nature. This is in part because burdens are more present in the lives of poor people (Lipsky 1980/2010), but also because bureaucrats can make snap judgments about their clients, by "dealing with faces," following their "own value system" (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003), or using other "non-rational factors like dominant societal discourses" (Nisar 2018a), rather than written rules. As a result, street-level bureaucrats can continually pathologize and deny access to people whose existence contest these discourses and norms. As discussed in the previous section, frontline workers often use whiteness as a credential, penalizing People of Color where white people are given the benefit of the doubt. This discretion and moral policing can lead to violence, most often directed to clients whose identities are furthest from the normalized sexual citizen.

Discretion leads to moral policing because street-level "capacity to form judgements and act does not exist apart from social systems" (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2012, s19); the social construction of client can lead street-level bureaucrats to inflict and police norms in order for their clients to receive services. This moral policing often shows up for trans clients, who can be judged for transgressing gendered norms (Spade 2006). As a result, frontline workers verbally humiliate their trans clients or require that they attend a program (e.g. counseling, drug treatment, or jobs training) dressed in accordance with their birth sex. Clients who refuse are then subjected to more sanctions and punishments, because when "street-level workers judge citizens as unworthy—as 'bad

guys'—then rules are used to withhold or minimize services or at times to punish, even to be brutal" (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003, 153). Once someone is labeled a "bad guy," then every infraction of the rules, every character flaw, is used to limit service, to punish even slight misdeeds, and to confirm the streel-level worker's moral judgment of the individual (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003).

Nisar (Nisar 2018a) finds that frontline workers in Pakistan enforce gender norms and biases against the Khawaja Sira. While norms may differ between Pakistan and the US, this finding is repeated by participants in the previous chapters. We see this when trans women (and trans people generally) are told to come back when they are dressed "correctly." We also are seeing this play out in the current legislative cycle where Trump and other legislators are introducing laws and policies that require people use sex-segregated public facilities in accordance with their birth sex. As Nisar states,

> It is critical to remember that frontline workers are also socially situated individuals who rely on dominant social norms in implementing the formal rules and interpreting citizen identities and in doing so may augment the administrative burden experienced by minority groups (116).

The Khwaja Sira in Pakistan and trans people in the US face similar types of social stigma in that all of their interactions with frontline workers are at risk of being tainted by archetypes as inherently dishonest, deviants, and overly sexual (Bettcher 2008; Mogul Ritchie and Whitlock 2011). In the US, these archetypes have been further substantiated recently through policy language that equates being trans as being inconsistent with being "honorable, truthful, and disciplined," ("Prioritizing Military Excellence and Readiness" 2025).

Through moral policing, dismissing interactions, and selective implementation of rules, frontline workers increase the burdens experienced by marginalized groups and sort them based on deservingness. The result is that when navigating the eligibility requirements and other administrative obstacles, applicants do not experience "rational, neutral, and efficient

organization"(Masood and Nisar 2021a), but rather a system that is built to enact social control and define in- and out-groups. These decisions are then supported by the public, who believe in this policing of non-normative sexual citizens. Previous studies have found that the general population is more tolerant of burdens when they are directed at certain populations (Johnson and Kroll 2020; Baekgaard, Moynihan, and Thomsen 2020). This creates and never-ending cycle, where low-income people, People of Color, disabled people, and others who are "seen as undeserving can expect to spend their lives struggling against burdens in their encounters with the state" (Herd and Moynihan 2018). The public, in turn, expects frontline workers to be "waste managers":

> The role of street-level bureaucracy is thus to manage the bodies and matter that remain out of place in the modern sanitized social order by first classifying them as abnormal, deviant, sick, or dirty and then dispose of them off in different disciplinary institutions. By doing this dirty work, street-level bureaucrats not only allow the state and dominant social groups to maintain the fantasy of a clean, tidy, and sanitized public order but also allow bureaucracy to maintain the image of a rational tool of modernity (Nisar and Masood 2019, 3).

As a result, bureaucratic control and moral policing are an accepted part of the job, and communities who must interact with the state are left in the hands of people who have the ability and discretion to punish those they deem deviant or abnormal using administrative burdens.

Violence stems both directly and indirectly from bureaucratic discretion and moral policing. It comes directly from bureaucrats who wield their power to humiliate their clients, or who enforce sanctions that sort and move bodies by removing children from their homes, sending clients back to prison or jail, or putting trans people into facilities according to birth sex. The violence occurs indirectly when bureaucrats use their discretion to bar clients from programs and services that have material impacts on their lives. This can occur when clients are denied benefits, such as SNAP, Medicaid, or Section 8, that then deprive them of food, medication, and housing. What matters more than delineating the type of violence is that the field first realize the burdens' capacity for violence. Discussed in the next section, I argue that the most effective way to view burdens and their capacity for violence it through the lens of governmentality.

Governmentality

Administrative violence as a concept helps us understand how violence can arise from burdens. However, not all burdens produce violence. The ultimate argument of this paper is that the most accurate way to view burdens that captures their capacity for violence is as a force of governmentality. Governmentality, as conceptualized by Foucault in his "Lectures at the Collège de France" in the late 1970s, is most succinctly the "art of government" (Foucault 1991). More specifically, Judith Butler defines governmentality as "a mode of power concerned with the maintenance and control of bodies and persons, the production and regulation of persons and populations, and the circulation of goods insofar as they maintain and restrict the life of the population" (Butler 2006, 52 qtd in Daum 2022, 13). It's this definition of governmentality that I find most useful when discussing administrative burdens. The goals of governmentality may vary, but when there is a "governmentality works to maintain extant legal, political, economic, and social hierarchies in order to preserve the privileged position and power of those located in the dominant public (Daum 2022, 13).

Most simply, burdens sort populations through access. While the administrative burden literature focuses more on where burdens originate and how they are used to control behaviors and participation, viewing burdens as a tool of governmentality opens more avenues to understand how burdens can be wielded to establish and maintain hierarchies and a cause of violence. By viewing administrative burden through the lens of power and population control, we can begin to search for exactly when and where burdens become violent. In the following section, I argue that burdens are best understood as forces of governmentality through sorting and norms.

Sorting

To understand how administrative burden functions as a tool of governmentality, we need to revisit the definition of administrative burden popularized by Moynihan, Herd, and Harvey (2015). Specifically,

> Administrative burden is conceptualized as a function of learning, psychological, and compliance, costs that citizens experience in their interactions with government. Second, we argue that administrative burden is a venue of politics, that is, the level of administrative burden placed on an individual, as well as the distribution of burden between the state and the individual, will often be a function of deliberate political choice rather than simply a product of historical accident or neglect (43).

Focusing on the second point, we can begin to see how burdens become a mode of "control of bodies and persons," as Butler says. Burdens, in their capacity for "hidden politics" (Moynihan, Herd, and Harvey 2015, 43), sort and regulate populations. Making costs insurmountable for a population achieves the same outcome as passing laws banning said population from program participation. But because the latter is often illegal, policymakers instead achieve the same ends through administrative processes. Foucault, notes this tendency, stating,

> With government, it is a question not of imposing law on men, but of disposing things: that is to say, of employing tactics rather than laws, and even of using laws themselves as tactics—to arrange things in such a way that, through a certain number of means, such and such ends may be achieved (Foucault 1991, 95).

We can view burdens as a tactic employed to achieve ends outside of the use of law—policymaking by other means. Burdens can also sort populations into socially constructed groups, such as the deserving and undeserving, which are then used to legitimize further burdens, reinforcing the status quo. This

> maintenance of the status quo is facilitated via the forces of governmentality that socially construct and designate certain bodies as transgressive or 'problem bodies,' and then work to deny, constrain, and remove those bodies from public space in order to mitigate the challenge that transgressive bodies pose to the hegemonic power structure and discourse (Daum 2022, 14).

Here, Daum is referencing laws and policies in 19th century San Francisco that removed gender-transgressive people from public spaces in the name of combatting nuisance and ensuring public safety. As discussed in Chapter 1, this socially constructed archetype of trans people as deviant and dangerous is used currently by bureaucrats to increase compliance and psychological costs.

To Foucault, sorting marks the move from governing through sovereignty to governing through discipline. Where sovereignty used public punishment, inflicting pain and even death as a venue to control the population through fear, discipline controls bodies more surreptitiously, through surveillance and norms. He notes,

> It is no longer a matter of bringing death into play in the field of sovereignty, but of distributing the living in the domain of value and utility. Such a power has to qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize, rather than display itself in its murderous splendor; it does not have to draw the line that separates the enemy of the sovereign from his loyal subjects. It effects distributions around the norm (Foucault 1990, 144).

In practice, this means that the state and those who are backed by its power sort the population as a mode to both understand it and control it. By enumerating the population, the state can both ensure the "safety, health, and welfare of the people" but also police and regulate "recalcitrant, wayward, messy, incoherent, and noncompliant bodies" (Currah and Stryker 2015, 1). The result is that people who are not legible or easily enumerated by administrative systems are caught between the compliance cost of making themselves more easily sortable (as discussed in Chapter 2) or be barred from accessing services that promote the welfare of the population. These sorting practices in turn both create and reinforce norms, which are the other essential tool of governmentality.

Norms

In the previous chapter, I argued that legibility is compliance cost; that is, that trans people often feel that to access programs and services, they needed to present themselves visually in accordance with binary norms of gender so that frontline workers do not deem them frauds. This legibility is not a legal requirement—there are no laws currently that require that an individual

present themselves visually in a particular manner. Rather, legibility as a normative sexual citizen confers legitimacy and level of deservingness. The normative sexual citizen is an example of disciplinary power, "power that establishes norms of good behavior and ideas about proper and improper categories of subjects" (Spade and Willse 2015). Disciplinary power is what creates social construction (Schneider and Ingram 1999); it invents and maintains categories that people are then sorted into. Institutions and individuals produce and uphold these norms, often through violence. Discussions in popular media also help to solidify norms through stories that elicit beliefs about groups (Spade and Willse 2015). We see this happening currently; beliefs about trans people originate from lawmakers and anti-trans activists, only to be reiterated and resolidified in the mass media.

Norms arise through both laws and through societal discipline. Where "legal normativity operates by laws that codify norms…discipline installs hierarchical differentiations that establish a division between those considered normal and abnormal, suitable and capable, and the others" (Lemke 2011, 47). It's through this dichotomy of legal normativity and discipline that burdens are best viewed. Burdens are created via laws and administrative procedures. Regardless of source, they become normalized as necessary for programs and services to run— for example, to determine eligibility or to decrease fraud—which in turn normalizes the existence of burdens in the first place. In tandem with already established norm that government is pervasive in the lives of people using public programs, burdens' power to sanction, punish, and in extreme cases, cause violence becomes expected. Those who then experience burdens are viewed as deserving of them.

Waiting periods for abortions offer a prime example. Before the fall of *Roe v. Wade* in 2022, multiple states sought to curtail abortions by requiring mandatory waiting periods. This compliance cost established a type of legal normativity, specifically that pregnant people would have their decisions questioned, implying a moral failing, a psychological cost. Legislators passed these laws

because of deep-seated beliefs against abortion, a norm born out of religious communities. But these burdens also produced a type of discipline, that divided pregnant people into the deserving, or those who carried pregnancies to term, and those who didn't. Even in states without waiting periods, discussions of abortions and who receives them perpetuates stereotypes and is used as evidence of the need for further burdens. In this way, discipline, like burdens, "seeks to reshape the way in which each individual, at some future point, will conduct him- or herself in a space of regulated freedom" (Rose 1999, 23).

The SAVE Act & Burdens as Governmentality

The examples throughout this chapter have offered empirical evidence of how administrative burdens can turn violent. From increasing compliance costs to turn away immigrants, to street-level bureaucrats using their discretion to punish clients who do not adhere to their moral views, burdens of all types can injure, deprive and lead to death. In this final section, I will use the SAVE Act (HR 22 2025-2026) as a case study, arguing that it is a prime example of why we should consider administrative burdens as a tool of governmentality and a source of violence. Specifically, the SAVE Act sorts US citizens into those who can and cannot provide required documents, dealing with problem bodies—namely women, Black and Indigenous people, and trans people—through disenfranchisement and barring the right to vote. By increasing burdens, the SAVE Act would lead to violence against marginalized populations through psychological harm, deprivation of a constitutional right, and vigilantism.

What is the SAVE Act?

Republican Congressman Chip Roy of Texas introduced the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility Act (the SAVE Act) in January 2025. Under the auspices of combating voter fraud, the bill requires that US citizens provide "documentary proof" of their citizenship when registering or

reregistering to vote in US elections. The SAVE Act follows in the footsteps of other facially neutral laws and policies whose main goal is to increase burdens to the point of decreasing participation. In the case of the SAVE Act, the proposed law creates redundancies while simultaneously requiring access to documents that more that 21 million people do not easily have (Morris and Henry 2024).

Burdens for Burdens' Sake

There are two components of the SAVE Act that drastically increase burdens. The first is that registrants must provide "documentary proof of US citizenship when registering to vote in federal elections" (HR 22 2025-2026). This documentary proof consists of

> (1) A form of identification issued consistent with the requirements of the REAL ID Act of 2005 that indicates the applicant is a citizen of the United States.
> (2) A valid United States passport.
> (3) The applicant's official United States military identification card, together with a United States military record of service showing that the applicant's place of birth was in the United States.
> (4) A valid government-issued photo identification card issued by a Federal, State or Tribal government showing that the applicant's place of birth was in the United States (HR 22 2025-2026).

Among these four types of documents, driver's licenses are the most commonly held, with roughly 90% of Americans having a driver's license (Lazo 2019). However, a report by the Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement found that nearly 21 million voting-age American citizens do not currently have an unexpired driver's license. Another 28.6 million citizens who have an unexpired license have not updated their address or name on it (Rothschild, Novey, and Hanmer 2024).[5] Unless they had one of the other forms of acceptable documentation, and that documentation was correctly updated, these nearly 50 million people would have to overcome the compliance, learning, and psychological costs of obtaining and/or updating their driver's licenses to then face burdens again to register to vote.

[5] These numbers are for regular licenses, and not Real ID compatible enhanced driver's licenses.

The SAVE Act also requires that anyone who registers or reregisters to vote, regardless of whether they do so in person, online, or via mail, must physically present their documentation in person (Morris and Henry 2025). This requirement presents more burdens; registrants must understand this "show me your papers" in-person requirement (Morris and Henry 2025) and then overcome further learning, compliance, and psychological costs. Once in person, applicants then face potential issues of bureaucratic discretion. Viewed through the lens of governmentality, we can see that these requirements of the SAVE Act work to divide the population between "regular" voters, and more problem bodies—those that cannot easily produce the (often changing) required evidence of their citizenship.

It is not a coincidence that the people most likely impacted by the SAVE Act are members of marginalized communities—particularly women, Black and Indigenous people, and trans people. These communities have all been historically marginalized and punished by government through implicit and explicit violent forces of governmentality. The SAVE Act functions to reify the historic marginalization of these communities through voter suppression. Each community would be impacted slightly differently by the SAVE Act, with people that have intersecting identities experiencing compounded marginalization. For example, Women who change their last name after marriage could be denied registration under SAVE, particularly if they don't have an enhanced license or passport. If a woman who registers to vote brings a driver's license that reflects her married name and her birth certificate that does not, she would ostensibly be required to also show a marriage license to explain the discrepancy in last name. However, this "fix" to the discrepancy is nowhere in the text of the bill. Rather, proponents of the bill offer it as a sign that the SAVE Act does not disenfranchise women (Germer 2025). But that argument misses two key points. First, requiring yet another document, and one that is not used daily, creates a set of burdens that are specific to women (or other individuals who change their last at marriage). Second, it assumes that

the voting officials overseeing discrepancies in documentation will implement documentation requirements equitably or uniformly. Once again, the in-person requirements of the SAVE Act leave open the door for bureaucratic discretion to perpetuate violence through administrative burdens. At the same time, not every result of the SAVE Act can be convincingly viewed as violence. For that reason, I argue that viewing SAVE as a force of governmentality provides a better lens with which to understand how the act would maintain and control bodies and regulate populations restricting outcomes.

Governmentality and the SAVE ACT

Facially, the SAVE Act can be viewed as a force of governmentality in that it creates a universal standard of what documents people can use to prove their citizenship for the purposes of registering to vote. Like most laws, SAVE is "devoted to rationalizing and standardizing what was social hieroglyph into a legible and administratively more convenient format" (Scott 2020, 3). While Scott is speaking about early modern Europe, where "social hieroglyphs" were disparate pastoral laws, practices, and customs, the authors of SAVE are treating state voter laws in a similar manner. They are seen as scattered, nonuniform, and based on regional and political norms. For instance, the West Coast vote-by-mail states—California, Oregon, and Washington—have different legal requirements than states with more stringent requirements such as Alabama and Mississippi. They also have a culture of promoting voting, rather than restricting it. A large part of these differences stem from the history of voter suppression in Confederate states. Regardless of which set of laws it sought to universalize, SAVE would be a unifying force that could be monitored by the federal government. For instance, if the entire country took to mail-in voting and "motor voter" registration (where people can register to vote at the DMV, which is allowed to varying degrees in 24 states; ("Automatic Voter Registration," n.d.), SAVE would still sort the population and create and reify norms, albeit much more liberal ones. Instead, the Act is much more punitive, expanding both legal

normativity and discipline to more stringently control who is allowed to vote. SAVE does not explicitly remove anyone's right to vote, a right enshrined in the US constitution (with exceptions for people who have been incarcerated). Instead, SAVE acts as a force of governmentality in tandem with the right to vote "in order to continue to enact supremacist and hierarchical regimes and socially construct illegible populations and institutionally locate them at the margins of the public" (Daum 2022, 16). SAVE is purposely written to increase administrative burdens, both by requiring the use of documents many people do not have readily available, and by causing confusion and fear among those who could be most impacted.

The historically marginalized—trans people, women, and Black and Indigenous people—would be further pushed to the boundaries of citizenship through SAVE's draconian requirements. Like other examples of where burdens become violence, SAVE's most violent act would be the disenfranchisement of populations who have the most to lose. In this current political climate, it also could increase vigilantism, which is already on the rise at polling places as citizens take it upon themselves to combat the specter of fraud (Anderman 2025).

Conclusion

Administrative violence and governmentality offer two novel lenses through which to examine burdens and their capacity to perpetuate violence. Building on the work of Chapters 1 and 2, this final chapter looks at the disciplinary power of norms, particularly that of the normative sexual citizen. More specifically, this theoretical chapter investigates how burdens function as policymaking by other means through norms and sorting.

First, I look at how burdens restrict access through administrative changes, particularly when doing so via changing laws is untenable or illegal. I then look to bureaucratic leeway and vigilantism—two behaviors directly related to burdens. Bureaucratic leeway allows for burdens to be exacerbated at the street-level, while vigilantism is both a byproduct of norms and can further

increase burdens, particularly psychological costs. I turn to Spade's concept of "administrative violence," or the ways that government systems, bureaucratic processes, and institutionalized norms create and perpetuate violence, extending administrative burdens past the limits of the literature thus far. Administrative violence produces harm directly, in the form of psychological and physical violence, but also by impacting people's life courses downstream. Administrative violence also creates and perpetuates labels and norms, that like burdens, dictate who is seen as deserving, and who is not.

Ultimately, because burdens do not automatically produce violence, but do automatically sort the population to some capacity, I settle on Foucault's concept of governmentality as the most useful avenue to extend administrative burden to include instances of violence. Governmentality, as the "art of government" (Foucault 1991) is a mode of power with which bodies and populations are sorted. It is a tool with which governments can catalogue and standardize the population for the promotion of the general welfare, but also with which it can surveil, police, and punish. Like burdens, this duality means that governmentality's effects are distributive; problem bodies are the most surveilled and controlled, while normative sexual citizens benefit from comparatively surveillance-free daily lives.

The SAVE Act offers a prime example of how burdens can be viewed as forces of governmentality. The Act, which seeks to restrict the documents citizens can use to register to vote, functions as policymaking by other means; the compliance burdens the Act would cause would likely disenfranchise a large swath of the voting-eligible population who do not readily have access to updated documents that prove citizenship (such as a valid passport). The SAVE Act offers a prime example of how burdens function as a force of governmentality. The proposed law increases learning, compliance, and psychological costs, and targets those most vulnerable. It would function

both as policymaking by other means, but also as a tool to impose violence by humiliating and disenfranchising, impacting life courses of populations who could no longer vote.

This chapter serves as a starting point. In it, I seek to answer the questions when, where, and how do burdens become and/or perpetuate violence? How do burdens reenforce norms and create new ones? And how do burdens sort and then push "problem bodies" to the edges of society? Future work could investigate these questions more deeply or use other current examples (as I do with the SAVE Act) to answer what it might mean for the field if we accept administrative burden as a force of governmentality. Future work should also interrogate burdens and their capacity for violence. How do we approach analyzing and categorizing burdens that have tangible impacts on people's life courses, when those impacts include psychological violence or even death? Does the racialized burdens framework adequately account for the violence historically committed against marginalized communities whose effects are still seen today?

Conclusion

This dissertation explores how transgender people in the US experience administrative burdens. Across three chapters, I explore the learning, compliance, and psychological costs that trans and gender-expansive people face when applying for safety net programs, interrogating how policymakers often use norms to create burdens, which in turn create and reify norms further. Additionally, I look at how trans and gender-expansive people cope with having to interact with government workers, and ask, when do burdens become sources of violence?

Echoing previous foundational work (e.g. Herd and Moynihan 2019; Barnes 2019; Bell et al. 2023), Chapter 1, "Normative Sexual Citizens: Administrative Burden, Citizen-State Interactions, and Transgender People in the US," illustrates how burdens can dissuade program participants from applying and/or reapplying. Using primary-collected survey data and interviews, I find that demographic characteristics and ID possession do not predict whether an individual will apply for SNAP, Medicaid, and/or Unemployment Insurance. Most trans people were able to navigate and overcome the learning, compliance, and psychological costs of the application process. However, many participants spoke of the high psychological costs they were forced to navigate specifically because they were trans. Many felt it a tacit requirement to align their appearances with the sex is listed on their identity documents, regardless of their actual gender identity. This need to portray oneself as what I term a "normative sexual citizen" through compulsory cisness is born out of gendered and racialized ideas of who is deserving of government aid in the United States.

The findings from this chapter contribute to administrative burden theory by offering an avenue for public administration to expand its understanding of gender beyond the binary. I do so by interrogating the relationships between burdens and program application, as well as how the disciplinary norm of the normative sexual citizen requires compulsory cisness from gender non-normative people. I also introduce the idea of population-specific burdens, arguing that trans-

specific compliance costs illustrate how "burdens help the state regulate gender and shape gender relations" (Herd and Moynihan 2024, 2) and lead to other trans-specific burdens down the road.

Chapter 2, "'I deadnamed myself until my documents matched': Trans People's Coping Strategies During Citizen-State Interactions," delves deeper into psychological burdens, using Goffman's dramaturgical analysis as a method to interrogate the nexus of passing, coping, and legibility in the eyes of the state. In this chapter, I seek to answer Nielsen et al.'s call to use their work as a "starting point to embark [on] a research agenda on citizen's coping behavior" (2021, 383). Building on Chapter 1, I find that trans people engage in both preparatory and during-interaction coping behavior, working to align their outward presentation with often localized ideals of the normative sexual citizen. This can include dressing professionally, speaking in a certain way, or working to take up as little space as possible.

From these findings, I argue that Nielsen et al.'s model would be improved by adding another type of citizen— "normalizers"— or individuals that align themselves to meet standards of the normative sexual citizen discussed in the previous chapter. Normalizers who cannot fully be seen as normative sexual citizens (for example, certain disabled people) may engage in another type of normalizing behavior where they attempt to align themselves with the dominant narrative of their group.

Finally, in Chapter 3, "Burdens, Governmentality, and Violence," I ask the theoretical questions, when, where and how do burdens become violent? I seek to answer these questions in three ways: first, by examining how the "policymaking by other means" can be used to target certain groups for violence through their constructed, distributive, and consequential nature. Second, I use the work of queer theorists such as Dean Spade and Paisley Currah, demonstrating burdens perpetuate norms under the guise of neutral administrative practices, referred to as "administrative violence" (Spade 2015). Finally, I argue that instead of only looking for the demarcation between

burdens and violence, the field would benefit by considering administrative burdens as forces of governmentality that control populations and reproduce norms that have consequences ranging from minor inconvenience to death.

Taken together, this mixed-method dissertation offers one of the first in-depth studies of transgender Americans' experiences of administrative burden. The first goal of this dissertation is to build a foundation for the field of public administration to better understand what gender is and how it functions. Ultimately, my aim for this dissertation is that it inspires future administrative burden and public administration scholars to understand that gender is not only an independent variable, but also an ever-changing label that can determine who is counted, who is deserving, and who is pushed to the margins.

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Appendix A: Chapter 2 Demographic Data

Variable	N = 43
Race	
White	62.8%
Black	11.6%
Latino/Latina/Latine/Latinx	25.6%
Asian	20.9%
Hispanic	11.6%
Native American/Alaskan Native	11.6%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	4.7%
Middle Eastern/North African	4.7%
Gender	
Transfeminine	20.9%
Nonbinary transfeminine	20.9%
Nonbinary	25.6%
Nonbinary transmasculine	23.3%
Transmasculine	9.3%
Age	
Mean (SD)	30 (8.3)
Current Region of Residence	
Northeast: New England (CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT)	11.6%
Northeast: Mid-Atlantic (NY, NJ, PA)	11.6%
Midwest: East North Central (IL, IN, MI, OH, WI)	11.6%
Midwest: West North Central (IA, KS, MN, MO, NE, ND, SD)	9.3%
South: South Atlantic (DE, DC, FL, GA, MD, NC, SC, VA, WV)	4.7%
South: East South Central (AL, KY, MS, TN)	2.3%
South: West South Central (AR, LA, OK, TX)	11.6%
West: Mountain (AZ, CO, ID, MT, NV, NM, UT, WY)	7.0%
West: Pacific (AK, CA, HI, OR, WA)	30.2%
Programs (considered and/or applied to)	
SNAP only	11.6%
Medicaid only	7.0%
Unemployment only	11.6%
SNAP & Medicaid	34.9%
SNAP & Unemployment	7.0%
Medicaid & Unemployment	4.7%
SNAP, Medicaid, & Unemployment	23.3%
Name & Gender Marker Changes	
Changed name via court order	23.3%
Changed name on driver's license	14.0%
Changed gender marker on driver's license	20.9%

Appendix B: Survey Instrument

What is this study about?

You are being asked to participate in a University of Washington research study about understanding interactions between transgender and nonbinary adults and the government. It is up to you to decide whether you want to participate. If you decide to enroll, you can stop participation at any time.

We are asking you to be in the study because we would like to know more about how trans and nonbinary adults in the US view interacting with government when attempting to access services, along with any long-range impacts these interactions may have. We also would like to understand what personal, social, structural, and economic factors impact these interactions. By doing this study, we hope to develop strategies to decrease barriers to services for trans and nonbinary adults. We are aiming to recruit up to 1,000 trans adults for the survey, and 40 trans adults for interviews.

Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in this study.

What will you be asked to do?

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to participate in a one-time online survey and/or one-on-one private Zoom interview to answer questions relating to experiences you've had when interaction with various government agencies, as well as any times you have avoided applying for a service or program. We will also ask questions specific to personal, social, structural, and economic factors that could impact these experiences.

If scheduled for an interview, we will only be audio recording via a private Zoom meeting, and no video recordings will be made. All data collected via surveys and interviews will be anonymized and de-identified. We will omit from the final transcript or reports any instances of personal identifying information to protect your and others' privacy and confidentiality.

There are no costs from you to participate in this study. The survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete, and you will be compensated $10 via an electronic gift card once reviewed by staff for completion. The interviews, if invited, will take approximately 1 hour and you will be compensated $75 via an electronic gift card once reviewed by staff for completion. To make

the survey user-friendly, we will set it up with multiple pages where you may move back and forth between pages or stop and continue at another time as long as you use the same device. You can also view the progress bar at the bottom of the survey page to see where you are and how far you have left in the survey. You also do not have to complete the survey – if at any point you do not want to answer any further questions, you may stop the survey. We encourage you to complete the survey in one sitting, however, you may pick up at another time to return to the survey using the same browser and device you started on.

This study is completely voluntary. Some of the questions may make you feel uncomfortable. You may skip or decline any questions you prefer not to answer or do not feel comfortable answering. You may also withdraw at any time you want. If you do not join the study, you will not be penalized or lose benefits to which you are entitled.

What will happen to the information you provide?

There are no direct benefits for you if you agree to participate in this study. The information we collect will be useful and helpful in the future in improving access to services among transgender and nonbinary adults.

To maintain confidentiality, we will assign you a participant ID. Your responses will not be connected to your identity, and we will not collect any identifiable information, including your name. The information you provide will be anonymous. This means that your answers cannot be traced back to you. Research data will be destroyed after the records retention period required by state and/or federal law.

There are no plans to provide results to any or all participants. Any reports (i.e., manuscript publications, conference presentations, etc.) from this study will be anonymized. This study is funded by the Russel Sage Foundation and the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

The results of the study will be published without your name attached and will maintain confidentiality. You understand that the text and any figures published in the article will be freely available on the internet and may be seen by the general public. By signing this form, you understand and provide consent for publication.

What can you do if you want more information?

Talk to the study team. Isaac Sederbaum is the lead researcher at the University of Washington for this study and can be contacted at the general study email: transgovtstudy@uw.edu. Please allow 5-7 business days for a response.

Talk to someone else. If you want to talk with someone who is not part of the study team about the study, your rights as a research subject, or to report problems or complaints about the study, contact the UW Human Subjects Division at hsdinfo@uw.edu or 206-543-0098.

Once again, please note that your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can always withdraw, and refuse to answer or skip a question at any time you choose. Please feel free to message the study team via email before signing if you have any remaining questions about the information presented in this consent form.

Electronic Consent: Please select your choice below. You may print a copy of this consent form for your records. You may also ask for a copy of the consent form that you signed by emailing the study team above.

Clicking on the "Agree" button indicates that:

- You have read the above information.
- You voluntarily agree to participate.
- You are 18 years of age or older.

My survey has previously been attacked by bots. As a result, you will now be unable to take the survey while using a VPN. Please turn off any VPN before proceeding and select that you have shut it off.

- ○ I have not shut off my VPN.
- ○ I have shut off my VPN.

Screener 1: Do you identify as transgender, nonbinary, or another non-cisgender identity?

- ○ Yes, I am trans, nonbinary, or another non-cisgender gender identity.
- ○ No, I am cisgender.

Screener 2: Are you 18 years old or older?

- ○ Yes, I am 18 or older.
- ○ No, I am 17 or younger.

Which of the following describes your race/ethnicity? Please check all that apply.

- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Black
- ☐ Latinx/Latine/Latina/Latino
- ☐ Hispanic
- ☐ Middle Eastern or North African
- ☐ Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ☐ White
- ☐ Alaskan Native, American Indian, or Native American
- ☐ Another race (please specify): _____

How old are you?

▼ 18 ... 99

In which state do you currently reside?

▼ Alabama ... Wyoming

Which of the following describes your gender identity? Please check all that apply.

- [ ] Transgender man, trans man, or transmasculine
- [ ] Transgender woman, trans woman, or transfeminine
- [ ] Man
- [ ] Woman
- [ ] Nonbinary
- [ ] Agender
- [ ] Gender queer
- [ ] Femme
- [ ] Two spirit or another term used by indigenous people
- [ ] Another gender identity (please specify): _____

Regarding your current employment status, are you currently (check all that apply):

- [ ] Employed full time
- [ ] Employed part time
- [ ] Self-employed (e.g. own your own business)
- [ ] Unemployed/out of work
- [ ] Student
- [ ] Retired
- [ ] Disabled or unable to work
- [ ] Something else (please specify): _____

What was your approximate personal income (before taxes) last year from all sources except food stamps (SNAP) or WIC?

- ○ No income
- ○ Less than $25,000
- ○ $25,000 - $49,999
- ○ $50,000 - $99,999
- ○ $100,000 - $149,999
- ○ $150,000 - $199,999
- ○ $200,000 or more

The following section will ask you questions about your experiences with various government programs.

Please click strongly agree if you have read this question.

- ○ Strongly disagree
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Neither disagree no agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Strongly agree

Since identifying as trans, nonbinary, or some other non-cisgender identity, **have you ever needed or considered using** any of the following federal programs? Choose all that apply.

- ☐ SNAP- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (also known as Food Stamps)
- ☐ Medicaid (may have a state-specific name in your state)
- ☐ Unemployment Insurance
- ☐ None of the above

You said that at some point since identifying as trans, nonbinary, or some other non-cisgender identity that you needed or considered using SNAP. Did you apply?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

State In which state did you apply for SNAP benefits? If you applied in multiple, please answer the most recent state.

▼ Alabama ... Wyoming

Did you receive SNAP benefits?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ I'm not sure

Are you currently receiving SNAP benefits?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ I'm not sure

You selected that you are no longer receiving benefits. Please select all of the reasons that you are no longer receiving benefits.

- [ ] No longer eligible
- [ ] No longer need them
- [ ] No longer wished to receive benefits
- [ ] Did not reapply/recertify
- [ ] I do not know why I am no longer receiving benefits
- [ ] Another reason (please specify)

Did you find any part of the SNAP application process stressful? If so, what?

_____

You selected that you did not apply for SNAP benefits. Why not? Please select all that apply.

- [ ] Didn't know how to apply
- [ ] Didn't know if eligible
- [ ] Didn't have an ID that correctly reflects my name
- [ ] Didn't have an ID that correctly reflects my gender identity
- [ ] Didn't have time to apply
- [ ] Stressed out by the application process
- [ ] Embarrassed to receive benefits
- [ ] Worried about judgement for receiving benefits
- [ ] Worried about mistreatment due to being trans, nonbinary, or another non-cisgender identity
- [ ] Worried that I'd be denied benefits because I am trans, nonbinary, or another non-cisgender identity
- [ ] Something else (please specify): _____

Did you have to do any of the following as a result of not applying for SNAP benefits? Please select all that apply.

- [ ] Cut size of meals or skipped meals because there was not enough money for food
- [ ] Eat less than you should because there is not enough money for food
- [ ] Visit a food pantry or other food donation program

☐ Something else (please specify): _____

You said that at some point since identifying as trans, nonbinary, or some other non-cisgender identity that you needed or considered using Medicaid. Did you apply?

○ Yes

○ No

Medicaid State In which state did you apply for Medicaid benefits? If you applied in multiple, please answer the most recent state.

▼ Alabama ... Wyoming

Receive Medicaid? Did you receive Medicaid benefits?

○ Yes

○ No

○ I'm not sure

Currently Medicaid Are you currently receiving Medicaid benefits?

○ Yes

○ No

○ I'm not sure

You said that you are no longer receiving Medicaid benefits. Please select all of the reasons you are no longer receiving benefits

- [ ] No longer eligible
- [ ] No longer need them
- [ ] No longer wish to receive benefits
- [ ] Did not reapply/recertify
- [ ] I do not know why I am no longer receiving benefits
- [ ] Another reason (please specify): _____

Did you find any part of the Medicaid application process stressful? If so, what?

_____

You selected that you applied for Medicaid benefits but did not receive them. Why not?

- ○ Application was denied
- ○ Didn't finish/submit application
- ○ I do not know why I did not receive Medicaid benefits
- ○ Something else (please specify): _____

You selected that you did not apply for Medicaid. Why not? Please select all that apply.

- [ ] Didn't know how to apply
- [ ] Didn't know if eligible
- [ ] Didn't have an ID that correctly reflects my name
- [ ] Didn't have an ID that correctly reflects my gender identity
- [ ] Didn't have time to apply
- [ ] Stressed out by the application process
- [ ] Embarrassed to receive benefits
- [ ] Worried about judgement for receiving benefits
- [ ] Worried about mistreatment due to being trans, nonbinary, or another non-cisgender identity
- [ ] Worried that I'd be denied benefits because I am trans, nonbinary, or another non-cisgender identity
- [ ] Something else (please specify): _____

In which state did you apply for Unemployment Insurance benefits? If you applied in multiple, please answer the most recent state.

▼ Alabama ... Wyoming

Did you receive Unemployment Insurance benefits?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ I'm not sure

Are you currently receiving Unemployment Insurance benefits?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ I am not sure

You said that you are no longer receiving Unemployment benefits. Please select all of the reasons you are no longer receiving benefits.

- ☐ No longer eligible
- ☐ No longer need them
- ☐ No longer wish to receive benefits
- ☐ Did not reapply/recertify
- ☐ I do not know why I am no longer receiving benefits
- ☐ Another reason (please specify): _____

Did you find any part of the Unemployment application process stressful? If so, what?

_____

You selected that you applied for Unemployment benefits but did not receive them. Why not?

- ○ Application was denied
- ○ Didn't finish/submit application
- ○ I do not know why I did not receive Unemployment benefits
- ○ Something else (please specify)

You selected that you did not apply for Unemployment Insurance. Why not? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ Didn't know how to apply
- ☐ Didn't know if eligible
- ☐ Didn't have an ID that correctly reflects my name
- ☐ Didn't have an ID that correctly reflects my gender identity
- ☐ Didn't have time to apply
- ☐ Stressed out by the application process
- ☐ Embarrassed to receive benefits
- ☐ Worried about judgement for receiving benefits
- ☐ Worried about mistreatment due to being trans, nonbinary, or another non-cisgender identity
- ☐ Worried that I'd be denied benefits because I am trans, nonbinary, or another non-cisgender identity
- ☐ Something else (please specify): _____

Were any of the following a result of not applying for Unemployment Insurance? Please select all that apply.

- [ ] I could not afford rent
- [ ] I was late on rent payments
- [ ] I could not afford other payments (e.g. utilities, internet, student loans, etc.)
- [ ] I was late on other payments (e.g. utilities, internet, student loans, etc.)
- [ ] I could not afford foo
- [ ] Something else (please specify): _____

Do you feel that your experiences with any of these programs (whether needing, considering applying, applying, or participating in them) has changed over time? If yes, how?

_____

This next section will ask questions about legal name change and your current identity documents, such as your birth certificate.

Which of the following describes your gender identity? Please check all that apply.

- ☐ Transgender man, trans man, or transmasculine
- ☐ Transgender woman, trans woman, or transfeminine
- ☐ Man
- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Nonbinary
- ☐ Agender
- ☐ Gender queer
- ☐ Femme
- ☐ Two spirit or another term used by indigenous people
- ☐ Another gender identity (please specify): _____

Did you ever try OR complete the process to get a legal name change to match your gender identity via a **court order**?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

How much did your legal name change cost? Please include the cost of legal help, court fees, newspaper publication (if needed), etc.

- ○ $0
- ○ $1 - $99
- ○ $100 - $249
- ○ $250 - $499
- ○ $500 - $749
- ○ $750 - $999
- ○ $1000 or more
- ○ I do not remember the cost of my legal name change

You selected that you have never tried or completed the process to get a legal name change via court order. Why not? Please select all that apply.

- ☐ I feel like my name doesn't conflict with my gender identity
- ☐ I am not ready
- ☐ I cannot afford it
- ☐ I don't know how
- ☐ I believe that I am not allowed to (for example, because of my criminal record, immigration status, or residency
- ☐ I am worried that changing my name would out me
- ☐ I am stressed out by the process
- ☐ Something else (please specify): _____

Thinking about how your **NAME** is listed on all of your IDs and records that list your name, such as your birth certificate, driver's license, passport, etc., which of the statements below is most true?

- ○ All of my IDs and record list the name that I go by or prefer
- ○ Some of my IDs and records list the name that I go by or prefer
- ○ None of my IDs and records list the name that I go by or prefer

Which of these IDs/records have you changed to list your preferred **NAME**? Please provide an answer in each row.

	I DO NOT have this ID/record	I have changed my NAME on this ID/record	I am in the process of changing my NAME on this ID/record	I have not tried to change my NAME on this ID/record but I want to
Birth certificate	○	○	○	○
Driver's license or state issued non-driver ID	○	○	○	○
Social Security records	○	○	○	○
Passport	○	○	○	○
Student records (current or last school attended)	○	○	○	○
Work ID	○	○	○	○

Thinking about how your **GENDER** is listed on all of your IDs and records that list your gender, such as your birth certificate, driver's license, passport, etc. Which of the statements below is most true?

- ○ All of my IDs and record list my gender correctly
- ○ Some of my IDs and records list my gender correctly
- ○ None of my IDs and records list my gender correctly

Which of these IDs/records have you changed to list your preferred **GENDER**? Please provide an answer in each row.

	I DO NOT have this ID/record	I have changed my GENDER on this ID/record	I am in the process of changing my GENDER on this ID/record	I have not tried to change my GENDER on this ID/record but I want to	I do not want to change my GENDER on this ID/record
Birth certificate	○	○	○	○	○
Driver's license or state issued non-driver ID	○	○	○	○	○
Social Security records	○	○	○	○	○
Passport	○	○	○	○	○
Student records (current or last school attended)	○	○	○	○	○
Work ID	○	○	○	○	○

You said that none of your IDs or records list the gender you prefer. Why haven't you changed your gender on your IDs or records? Please all that apply.

- ☐ The gender options that are available (male or female) do not fit my gender identity
- ☐ I have not tried yet
- ☐ My request was denied
- ☐ I am not ready
- ☐ I cannot afford it
- ☐ I do not know how to
- ☐ I believe I am not allowed (for example, I have not had the medical treatment needed to change my gender on my ID, or I cannot get a doctor's letter needed to update my gender)
- ☐ I am worried that if I change my gender, I might not be able to get some benefits or services. These might include medical, insurance, employment, etc.
- ☐ Something else (please specify): _____

What is the best email to contact you for follow up? Your email address will be kept separately from your survey answers to preserve anonymity.

_____

In order to compensate you for taking this survey, the University of Washington requires an email address to send a digital gift card. Please provide an email below. Your email address will be kept separately from your survey answers to preserve anonymity. Please note that I have to manually email gift cards, so it may take up to 7 business days to receive the card.

_____

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

What is this study about?

You are being asked to participate in a University of Washington research study about understanding interactions between transgender and nonbinary adults and the government. It is up to you to decide whether you want to participate. If you decide to enroll, you can stop participation at any time.

We are asking you to be in the study because we would like to know more about how trans and nonbinary adults in the US view interacting with government when attempting to access services, along with any long-range impacts these interactions may have. We also would like to understand what personal, social, structural, and economic factors impact these interactions. By doing this study, we hope to develop strategies to decrease barriers to services for trans and nonbinary adults. We are aiming to recruit up to 1,000 trans adults for the survey, and 40 trans adults for interviews.

Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in this study.

What will you be asked to do?

If you agree to participate in this interview, you will be asked questions about your interactions or avoidance of interactions with the government. These questions will be based off your survey answers, which we may refer to directly. All data collected via this interview will be anonymized and de-identified. We will omit from the final transcript or reports any instances of personal identifying information to protect your and others' privacy and confidentiality.

There are no costs from you to participate in this study. The interview will take approximately 1 hour and you will be compensated $75 via an electronic gift card once reviewed by staff for completion. You also do not have to complete the interview – if at any point you do not want to answer any further questions, you may stop.

This study is completely voluntary. Some of the questions may make you feel uncomfortable. You may skip or decline any questions you prefer not to answer or do not feel comfortable answering. You may also withdraw at any time you want.

What will happen to the information you provide?

There are no direct benefits for you if you agree to participate in this study. The information we collect will be useful and helpful in the future in improving access to services among transgender and nonbinary adults.

To maintain confidentiality, we have previously assigned you a participant ID. Your responses will not be connected to your identity, and we will not collect any identifiable information, including your name. The information you provide will be anonymous. This means that your answers cannot be traced back to you. Research data will be destroyed after the records retention period required by state and/or federal law.

There are no plans to provide results to any or all participants. Any reports (i.e., manuscript publications, conference presentations, etc.) from this study will be anonymized. This study is funded by the Russell Sage Foundation and the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

The results of the study will be published without your name attached and will maintain confidentiality. You understand that the text and any figures published in the article will be freely available on the internet and may be seen by the general public. By signing this form, you understand and provide consent for publication.

What can you do if you want more information?

Talk to the study team. Isaac Sederbaum, is the lead researcher at the University of Washington for this study and can be contacted at the general study email: transgovtstudy@uw.edu. Please allow 5-7 business days for a response.

Talk to someone else. If you want to talk with someone who is not part of the study team about the study, your rights as a research subject, or to report problems or complaints about the study, contact the UW Human Subjects Division at hsdinfo@uw.edu or 206-543-0098.

Once again, please note that your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can always withdraw, and refuse to answer or skip a question at any time you choose. Please feel free to message the study team via email before signing if you have any remaining questions about the information presented in this consent form.

Electronic Consent: Please select your choice below. You may print a copy of this consent form for your records. You may also ask for a copy of the consent form that was read to you by emailing the study team above.

Clicking on the “Agree” button indicates that:

- You voluntarily agree to participate.
- You are 18 years of age or older.

ID Number:
Date of Interview:
Time of Interview:

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed! One of the main goals of this interview is for me to learn more about your experiences applying for services/considering applying for services and interacting with government.

Just to give you an idea of how we're going to go forward in this interview, we'll start with some basic questions about your identity, talk about program application (whether considered or actual), your IDs, and then interacting with government workers. I realize that this sounds like a lot, but I'm hoping this can be more like a conversation. Do you have any questions before we start?

Identity Questions

To start off, I have a few questions about your identity/how you identify:

1. How old are you now?
2. What month and year were you born?
3. What terms do you use to describe your gender?
4. What was the sex listed on your original birth certificate?
5. What is your sexual orientation?
6. How do you describe your race/ethnicity?
7. Do you identify as disabled and/or neuro-divergent?
8. Can you tell me about your experience and how you came to know that you were trans/nonbinary/non-cisgender?
    a. Did you medically transition? Socially?
    b. If yes, how old were you when you transitioned?

Program application (considered or actual)

In this next section, we will talk about your experiences with SNAP, Medicaid, and Unemployment. You indicated that you [thought about applying/applied for] [SNAP, Medicaid, Unemployment] at some point while identified as [how they identified].

9. What year did you most recently (consider applying/apply)?
10. What state was this in?
11. Can you tell me about your life in the time leading up to (thinking about applying/applying?)
    a. What type of housing were you in?
    b. Who did you live with?
    c. What was your employment situation?
    d. Where were you in your transition (if they had a transition experience)? Did you wait at all to medically transition before applying?

12. When you thought about applying, how (if at all), did being trans factor in?
13. Did you ask any trans people you know about the application process or their experience applying?

a. If yes, what did they tell you? How did their answers impact your choices to apply (if at all)?
b. If no, why not?

For those who applied:

14. Can you describe what the application experience was like?
15. How did you learn what you needed to do to apply?
16. Did you find any part of the application process (pre receiving benefits) stressful? If yes, what?
17. Did you have to interact with any case workers/workers from the program? if yes, how did you navigate those experiences as a trans person?
18. Did you spend much time (in your estimation) waiting-- either on line, on the phone, waiting for mail to come, etc.?
19. Did anyone help you apply?
    a. If yes, who? parent, social worker, friend, the internet
    b. If no, do you wish in hindsight that you'd sought help?
20. When you think about this program(s) and your application experience(s), how does it make you feel?

For those who didn't apply:

21. You indicated on your survey that you didn't apply because (list reasons checked). Can you tell me more about these reasons?
    a. If didn't know how or didn't know if eligible: where did you try to gather this info?
    b. if didn't have correct ID: how did not having correct ID lead you to not apply?
    c. If didn't have time: how did decide you didn't have enough time?
    d. If stressed out: what were you most stressed out about the process by?
    e. If embarrassed to receive benefits: what was embarrassing? did you feel you'd be judged by anyone? who?
    f. If worried about judgement for receiving benefits: by who? for what reasons?
    g. If worried about mistreatment due to being trans: what were you worried about experiencing? how did you weigh these worried against needing services?
    h. If worried would be denied services: why do you think you'd be denied?
22. You said that as a result of not applying (fill in choices). Can you tell me more about this?
    a. Was there anything else you experienced as a result of not applying?
23. Do you wish, in hindsight, that you would have applied for [program]?
24. When you think about this program(s) and your choice to not apply, how does it make you feel?

For those who applied to one program but not the other(s):

25. Why did you apply to (program 1) but not (program 2)?
26. How did applying to program 1 but not 2 impact your life?

For those who applied to both/all of the programs:

27. How, if at all, did applying to one program affect applying to the other(s)?

28. Did you learn things from applying to program 1 that helped you apply to the other(s)?
29. Did applying to program 1 make applying to the other(s) easier? harder? how?
30. when you think about the barriers you've faced in learning/applying to, are they all specific to being trans?

Questions about IDs

Name change questions

For those who changed their name via a court order:

31. can you describe what the name change process was like?
32. How did you learn what you needed to do to change your name via a court order?
33. How did going through the name change process make you feel?
    a. What if anything was stressful during the process?
    b. How did you feel after it was complete?

For those who did not change their name via court order:

34. You said that you did not try or complete a name change via a court order because:
    a. You feel like your name doesn't conflict with your gender identity. Can you tell me more about this? Is this the name you were given at birth? A nickname? Are there any situations where you feel deadnamed?
    b. You are not ready. Can you tell me more about this? Is there anything in particular you are waiting for? How do you think you'll know when you'll be ready? What will that feel like? How does it make you feel not having your name changed?
    c. You cannot afford it. Can you tell me more about this? Have you looked into organizations who help cover the costs of name changes? How does this make you feel not having your name changed?
    d. You don't know how. Can you tell me more about this? Where have you looked to learn about the name change process? Have you talked to anyone else about the process? How does it make you feel not having your name changed?
    e. You don't believe that you are allowed to. Can you tell me more about this? What has led you to believe this? Have you looked into organizations that help with name changes? How does it make you feel not having your name changed?
    f. You are worried that changing your name would out you. Can you tell me more about this? Are you waiting for anything in particular to change your name? How does it make you feel not having your name changed?
    g. You are stressed out by the process. Can you tell me more about this? What stresses you out the most about the process? Have you sought any resources or organization that could help with the process? How does it make you feel not having your name changed?
    h. Something else: fill in:
        i. Can you tell me more about this? How does it make you feel not having your name changed?

Name on ID questions (for those that changed their name via court order)

You indicated that you have change your _____ to display your preferred/changed name.

35. Can you describe what the process was like updating your ID(s) to the correct name?
    a. If they have more than one ID updated: were there differences in the ease of updating documents? Which ones were harder? Why?
36. How did you learn about what you needed to do to change your name on your _____ (insert ID)?
37. Did you have any help with the process?
    a. if yes, from whom?
    b. if no, how do you think it would have impacted the process for you (if at all)?
38. how did changing your name on your _____ (insert ID) make you feel?
39. For those who do not have all IDs updated: what has kept you from updating all of your IDs?
    a. How does it feel not having all your IDs updated with the correct name?

For anyone who has changed their name via a court order but not updated any of their IDs to show the name change

40. You have updated your name via court order but said that you have not updated any of your IDs from displaying the correct name. Can you tell me more about this?
    a. What has kept you from changing your name on any of your IDs?
    b. How does it make you feel not having the correct name on your IDs?

Gender marker change questions

For those who changed their gender marker on at least 1 ID:

41. Can you describe what the process was like updating your ID(s) to the correct gender marker?
    a. If they have more than one ID updated: were there differences in the ease of updating documents? Which ones were harder? Why?
42. How did you learn about what you needed to do to change your gender marker on your (insert ID)?
43. Did you have any help with the process?
    a. If yes, from whom?
    b. If no, how do you think it would have impacted the process for you (if at all)?
44. How did changing your gender marker make you feel?
45. For those who do not have all IDs updated: what has kept you from updating all of your IDs?
    a. How does it feel not having all your IDs updated with the correct gender?
    b. For those who said they do not want to change their gender on a certain ID: why not?
    c. Have you had any issues due to having your gender marker changed on some IDs and not others?

For those who have not changed their gender marker on any IDs:

46. You said that you have not changed your gender marker on any of you IDs because:

a. The gender options that are available do not fit your gender. Can you tell me more about this? Is there a way that you'd want your gender to be displayed on an ID?
b. You haven't tried yet. Can you tell me more about this? What has kept you from trying? What needs to happen in order for you to try?
c. Your request was denied. Can you tell me more about this? Do you know why it was denied? Do you know what you need to do in order to resubmit your request? Do you know what you need to do for it to be approved?
d. You are not ready. Can you tell me more about this? Is there anything in particular you are waiting for? How do you think you'll know when you'll be ready? What will that feel like? How does it make you feel not having your gender listed correctly on your IDs?
e. You cannot afford it. Can you tell me more about this? Have you looked into organizations who help cover the costs of gender marker changes? How does this make you feel not having your name changed?
f. You don't believe that you are allowed to. Can you tell me more about this? What has led you to believe this? Have you looked into organizations that help with gender marker changes? How does it make you feel not having your gender marker changed?
g. You don't know how. Can you tell me more about this? Where (if anywhere) have you looked to learn about the gender marker change process? Have you talked to anyone else about the process? How does it make you feel not having your gender marker changed?
h. You are worried that if you change your gender marker you might not be able to get some benefits or services. Can you tell me more about this? Which services? Have you looked anywhere to learn what would happen if you changed your gender marker in relation to these services?
i. Something else. Can you tell me more about this? How does it make you feel not having your gender listed correctly on your documents?

Interacting with others

47. How does it make you feel when you have to present your ID to someone who works in government? Is this different than how you feel when you have to present it to someone generally (e.g. at a store to purchase alcohol)?
48. Do you think you're read correctly as your gender identity? If not, why not?
49. Do you make a concerted effort to pass as cisgender or a binary gender when interacting with government workers)?
    a. If not, why not?
    b. If yes, what do you do?
    c. Does this apply for strangers generally as well? Why or why not?
50. When you think about having to interact with government workers to access [whichever program(s) they accessed], how does it make you feel?
51. For those who experiences some type of violence in an office: You said that you have shown ID where your name and/or gender do not match as you present and have experience [fill in blank]. Can you tell me about why happened?

Questions about the intersection of other identities:

We're nearly done. For this last section, I have some questions about other identities you hold.

52. How have your intersecting identities around race, class, ability, and being trans/nonbinary/fill in their word impacted how you navigate spaces?
    a. Is one of those identities the primary one in which you navigate spaces? Which? Why?
53. Does applying for/receiving [fill in programs] impact your identity?
54. Has the media portrayal of any of these identities impacted how you feel about yourself?
    a. If yes, how?
    b. If no, is there anything that impacts how you feel about yourself and any of the identities you hold?

Wrap up

Thank you so so much for participating in my dissertation research! I have two final questions.

55. I know we talked about a lot today, but is there anything you'd like to add or anything I missed?
56. So much of research about/on trans people is negative, and part of my research is combating that by highlighting our joy, hopes, and dreams. On that note, what goals or hopes do you have for yourself for your future?

That's all of the questions I have today. Thank you so much for your time and participation. We talked about some heavy stuff today, and interviews can be triggering. Do you feel ok about going about your day?

Appendix D: Recruitment Flyer

Seeking trans and nonbinary participants for a paid research study

Have you ever considered applying for or applied for Food Stamps (SNAP), Medicaid, and/or Unemployment benefits?

Are you:

- 18 or older
- Currently reside in the US
- Identify as trans, nonbinary, or another non-cisgender gender identity

The study involves an anonymous 15 minute online survey with the option to sign up for a paid interview at the end.

Participants will receive $10 for taking the survey and $75 for completing an interview.

Visit **tinyurl.com/transgovtstudy** or scan the QR code below to take the survey!

Questions or Comments?
Email Isaac at transgovtstudy@uw.edu

This study has been approved by the University of Washington's Human Subjects Division (HSD) IRB ID: STUDY00017669

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