'Good morning boys': Fa'afāfine and Fakaleiti experiences of Cisgenderism at an all-boys secondary school

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the schooling experiences of 12 fa'afāfine and fakaleiti who attended an all-boys faith-based secondary school in Aotearoa-New Zealand. Fa'afāfine are Samoan, and fakaleiti Tongans who are assigned male at birth, but enact varying degrees and types of behaviour deemed as feminine. There are currently no in-depth qualitative studies that examine the schooling experiences of these young people. Within the existing literature the experiences of fa'afāfine and fakaleiti are typically subsumed under the umbrella of transgender and/or non-binary students. This study examines participants' recollections of daily experiences of being fa'afāfine and fakaleiti at an all-boys school where any expression of femininity was frequently disallowed and denigrated. In this highly masculinised environment, participants describe the struggle to be 'like-women' and the cisgender discrimination they faced. Incidents of bullying, physical assault and marginalisation from teachers and students along with the pathologisation and erasure of their identities within school curricula and practices were daily occurrences. These accounts contribute to an emerging and broader picture of schools as cisgender spaces, in which educational structures and processes reinforce the idea there are only two genders, and that gender is based on sex assigned at birth.

Introduction

This study focuses on Fa'afāfine and Fakeleiti students' experiences at an all-boys faith-based[1] school in Aotearoa-New Zealand (Howell 2019). Fa'afāfine is a Samoan word that translates literally as 'in the manner of' or 'like a woman' (Schmidt 2016, 287 see also Hazenberg and Meyerhoff 2017; Feu'u 2017; Schmidt 2010; VanderLaan et al. 2014; Vasey and Bartlett 2007; Sua'ali'i 2001). Fakaleiti is the Tongan equivalent and refers to 'men who dress and act in a manner similar to women' (Good 2014, 213). Fa'afāfine and fakaleiti are terms used to describe people assigned male at birth, 'whose gendered behaviours are, to varying degrees, feminine' (Schmidt 2016, 287). In village life in Samoa and Tonga, fa'afāfine and fakaleiti are commonly identified by their preference for tasks usually allocated to women, such as cleaning and child-rearing, not on their physical appearance. Currently, it is unofficially estimated that there are 500 fa'afāfine in Samoa and 500 in Aotearoa-New Zealand (Schmidt 2015).

Westernisation and migration have influenced the embodiment of fa'afāfine who live in Aotearoa-New Zealand, resulting in a greater repudiation of masculinity and the adoption of heteronormative femininity (Schmidt 2016). Most migrant fa'afāfine remain part of their Samoan families and communities while forging networks with other fa'afāfine and trans* communities (Schmidt 2015) and are often politically aligned with the gay community (Schmidt 2015). There is minimal research about fa'afāfine, and even less about fakaleiti, with only a smattering of studies in this area (Manusaute, Fonua, Prescot-Faletau, L., Amanaki, Tu'u, L., & Taouma, 2017; Good 2014). Qualitative studies on the schooling experiences of fa'afāfine and fakaleiti are non-existent. Subsequently, this article aims to document and identify the needs and interests of these groups.

While the schooling experiences of fa'afāfine and fakaleiti have not constituted a discrete focus in research, they have sometimes been documented as part of larger studies on the experiences of trans*[2] students (Clark et al. 2014). This data is invaluable because fa'afāfine and fakaleiti share many discriminatory schooling experiences with trans* students. Being fa'afāfine or fakaleiti is a uniquely cultural phenomenon within Samoan and Tongan life-worlds however, and is not entirely captured by western notions of being a trans* person. For instance, Stryker (2014) explains the term trans* marks various forms of gender crossing as well as signalling ways of occupying genders that confound the gender binary (1). While some researchers refer to fa'afāfine and fakaleiti as a third gender (Petterson et al. 2016; Poasa 1992), Schmidt (2016) has proposed that fa'afāfine sit 'across' the gender binary, simultaneously embodying masculinity and femininity. Subsequently, being fa'afāfine implies a complex and sometimes contradictory combination of 'males', 'men', 'not-men', 'not-women' and 'like-women' (Schmidt 2016, 287). While Stryker's (2014) definition of trans* people as 'confounding the gender binary' hints at what it might mean to be fa'afāfine or fakaleiti, it does not do justice to a Samoan or Tongan worldview of these identities.

Our focus on fa'afāfine and fakaleiti is motivated by the fact that when included as part of the category of trans* students, their experiences of schooling are more negative than their non-trans* peers. For example, in a survey of over 8,000 secondary school students, those who identified as transgender and gender diverse were significantly more likely than other students to experience being physically harmed (49.9% vs 32.5%), bullied (17.6% vs 5.8%) or being afraid of someone hurting them at school (53.5% vs 39.8%) (Clark et al. 2014). Similar statistics surface despite educational reform in Aotearoa-New Zealand to acknowledge and support the identities and needs of trans* students. For instance, the Ministry of Education (2015) *Sexuality Education: A guide for principals, boards of trustees, and teachers* clearly states,

> 'there are opportunities within school programmes and wider school environment to acknowledge the sexual diversity of New Zealand communities and recognise the rights of those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and other sexual and gender identities' (11).

The rights of transgender and gender diverse students to equal access and appropriate sexuality education are also recognised in the *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education* (UNESCO, 2009), the *Rio Statement* (UNESCO 2011) and the *Born Free and Equal Policy* (United Nations 2012). Continued discrimination against trans* students'

reveals that such policies do not always translate into more positive experiences of schooling.

This study responds to the above findings and other research indicating there is minimal work to tackle transphobia compared with homophobia at school (Mitchell, Gray, and Beninger 2014). In accordance with Veale et al's (2019) call to 'further elucidate the experiences of a specific sector of the trans and non-binary population at school' (p.v) we focus on fa'afāfine and fakaleiti students. Given the scarcity of qualitative research on these two groups of students in school (Schmidt 2016) we hope findings might shed light on these young people's experiences from their own perspectives (Bowskill 2017). Such insights are necessary to create school environments that recognise, value and support fa'afāfine and fakaleiti students and seek to disrupt cisgenderism.

Literature and conceptual context

In the absence of studies of fa'afāfine or fakaleiti experience of schooling, the closest relevant literature concerns trans* studies of schooling. Most of this research comprises large-scale survey-based studies with a smattering of qualitative work from the USA, the UK, Canada and Australia. As noted above, this work reveals trans* students experience higher levels of bullying, harassment and discrimination at school than do their cisgender and lesbian, gay and bisexual peers (Jones & Hillier et al, 2013; Kosciw, Greytak, and Diaz 2009; Day, Perez-Brumer, and Russell 2018; McGuire et al. 2010; Taylor and Peter 2011). These same studies document negative discriminatory effects in terms of trans* students' academic achievement and engagement with schooling. For instance, trans* students are more likely to skip lessons or avoid school (Jones & Hillier et al, 2013) and be disciplined by teachers (O'Flynn 2016; Kosciw et al. 2018). They are also likely to have lower grade point averages, are less likely to plan to pursue post-secondary education, have lower self-esteem, higher levels of depression and, less sense of school belonging (Kosciw et al. 2018; Department for Children, Schools and Families 2009). In repeat longitudinal studies such as the US *National School Climate Survey*, experience of discrimination for LGB plateaued between the 2015 and 2017 surveys, but this did not occur for discrimination related to gender (Kosciw et al. 2018 p.xxv). Instead, there was a steady increase in reports of negative remarks towards transgender people between 2013 and 2017 (Kosciw et al. 2018 pxxiv). In addition, the percentage of students required to use toilet and changing rooms of the sex ascribed to them at birth, and who were prevented from using the name/pronoun they identified with, was higher in 2017 (Kosciw et al. 2018).

While there is less research on trans* youth experiences in Aotearoa-New Zealand, findings mirror those internationally. Two important large scale surveys have involving transgender youth nationally: the Youth'12 adolescent health survey mentioned above (Clark et al. 2014) and *Counting Ourselves: The Health and well-being of trans and non-binary people in Aotearoa-New Zealand* (Veale et al. 2019). In the latter survey of 1,178 participants aged 14–83 years, 8% (n = 94), completed a section about schooling. Almost half (49%) of trans* and non-binary students reported having been bullied at school in the last 12 months. More than a quarter had been bullied once or twice (28%), 10% had been bullied once a week, and 11% were bullied several times a week, or on most days (Veale et al. 2019, 61). The rate of bullying for students was more than four times higher than that experienced by cisgender secondary students in the previous Youth'12 survey (Veale et al.

2019, 61). Other Aotearoa-New Zealand studies that have included trans* people have focused on the prevalence of sexual violence in intimate relationships (Dickson 2017), substance use (Watson et al. 2019) and mental health (Tan et al. 2020). One of the few pieces of qualitative work in this area is Kerekere's (2017) exploration of the emergence of takātapui identity in Aotearoa-New Zealand. Takātapui is a traditional Māori concept which 'embrace[s] all Māori who identify with diverse sexes, genders and sexualities such as whakawāhine (trans women), tangata ira tāne (trans men), lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer' (Kerekere 2017, 2). The current study seeks to address the paucity of qualitative research about trans* young people in Aotearoa-New Zealand and examines the experiences of those who are specifically, fa'afāfine or fakaleiti.

Amidst a predominately bleak portrayal of trans* students' experiences of schooling, there are a few international studies which offer a more positive picture (McCormack 2012; Leonard 2019). Leonard's (2019) UK-based study of 3 transgender young people, revealed how they felt supported by their school's adoption of their preferred names and pronouns and by individual teachers who served as insulators to harassment. Participants also remarked on the importance of LGBTQ clubs in making them feel welcome and supported at school. These studies counter the dominance of negative representations of trans* people which can have victimising effects. We acknowledge that in focusing exclusively on the marginalisation of trans* students, moments of agency where schooling challenges are successfully navigated are sidelined. Concentrating on cisgenderism at school here, reflects a political imperative to emphasise schooling inequalities for fa'afāfine and fakaleiti previously undocumented specifically for this group.

In this article, we adopt the theoretical framework of 'cisgenderism' to analyse participants' schooling experiences. Drawing from Ansara and Hegarty (2013), cisgenderism describes 'the discriminatory ideology that delegitimises people's own designations of their genders and bodies' (162). Cisgenderism is a way of thinking which works to deny the existence of transgender people by giving precedence to an understanding of gender, based on sex assigned at birth (Bartholomaeus and Riggs 2017, 14). Cisgenderism has broader utility than a concept like 'transphobia' in its recognition of dominant discourses and systematic discrimination, rather than individual attitudes and biases (Bartholomaeus and Riggs 2017). Drawing on and adapting on the work of Ansara (2015), Bartholomaeus and Riggs (2017, 15) identify five discursive mechanisms by which cisgenderism occurs within the context of education: *binarising* where gender is understood as a binary of only two genders (i.e. male/female or transgender/cisgender); *misgendering* when descriptors are applied to someone, that ignore their own terminology to describe themselves; *erasing* or the failure to consider the existence of people whose gender differs from that normatively expected of their assigned sex at birth; *pathologising* which refers to viewing people's behaviours or expressions related to gender as pathological or disordered; and *marginalising* when, for example, the argument is made that the classroom is no place for discussion of transgender people. We reveal how these forms of cisgenderism are apparent in participants' narratives below.

The concept of cisgenderism is not without critics however, and we acknowledge Enke's (2013) illumination of how this term institutes a trans*/cisgender binary. This occurs because the cisgender/transgender dyad reinstates the power and centrality of those whose gender identity does not diverge from their assigned sex. Enke (2013) also

argues that the use of the prefix 'cis' reinforces gender as 'a self-evident, autonomous category' (p.239) in which 'male' and 'female' are more stable and narrowly defined than ever. Our use of 'cisgenderism' is political, expressing a wish to acknowledge trans* people's ways of experiencing and naming the world. Importantly, cisgenderism is a derivative of the word 'cisgender' which emerged from trans* activist discourses in the 1990s that critiqued normative ways of describing sex and gender (Aultman 2014). In selecting cisgenderism to characterise participants' experiences over other concepts like heteronormativity, we pay homage to its historic roots in trans* activism and politics.

Methodology

Twelve participants were recruited to this study, 10 who self-identified as fa'afāfine and 2 as fakaleiti. The greater number of fa'afāfine participants reflects the wider composition of the population where there are more Samoan (183,721) than Tongan (82,389) people living in Aotearoa-New Zealand (nzdostats.stats.govt.nz accessed 16.5.20). While there are no reliable statistics concerning actual numbers of fa'afāfine and fakaleiti young people in Aotearoa-New Zealand, 12 in one school is a high number and indicative of the predominately Pasifika school composition. The students selected belonged to a school-based peer support group known as 'The Goddesses'[3] which provided support and mentors for those who identified as fa'afāfine or fakaleiti. This group maintained contact via social media after leaving school and participants were recruited through a message posted to a digital forum inviting them to participate in the research. At the time of the study all participants were over 20 years of age, with the oldest being 28 and the median age 26 years. The gender descriptors used throughout reflect the pronouns participants themselves used at the time of the research. In all cases this was she/her, even if identity descriptors had changed from their time at school, from for example fa'afāfine to transgender.

Fieldwork was conducted by the first author, who at the time of the research was affiliated with the school the participants previously attended. Both authors identify as cisgender women and have several decades' involvement with the LGBTQIA+ community. Fa'afāfine and fakaleiti communities can be private and wary of outsiders, so it is necessary they talk to someone they know and trust. The first author's position as a well-liked and trusted adult connected with the school, was crucial to gaining access to participants and enabling them to feel comfortable in sharing their experiences. Given participants had left school and were no longer in contact with the researcher, there was no conflict of interest or structural power relationship in play. The first author was still affiliated with the school participants had attended at the time of the research, and was able to confirm the practices of discrimination they described continued to occur, although she no longer witnessed acts of physical aggression. The research received ethical approval from The University of Auckland Human Ethics Committee.

The research methods employed consisted of two focus groups of five-six participants, and one individual interview. The first focus group contained five participants, four of whom identified as fa'afāfine and one as fakaleiti and was held in a classroom at their old school during the weekend with the school's permission. Participants in both focus groups chose where they felt most comfortable and subsequently wanted the research to occur. This session lasted roughly three hours and utilised a whiteboard on which

participants brainstormed ideas about, for example, what being faʻafāfine or fakaleiti meant to them. The second focus group consisted of six participants, five who identified as faʻafāfine and one as fakaleiti and to encourage uninhibited discussion, occurred in a conference meeting room convenient to where participants lived.

Focus groups were semi-structured, commencing with the question, 'In general how would you describe your secondary school experience?' This question provided an opening to the research focus of 'What are the experiences of faʻafāfine and fakaleiti who attended an all-boys school?' Next, a series of sub-questions traversing topics such as experiences of discrimination, sources of support, and participants' recommendations for a more inclusive school environment were asked. Findings reported below are drawn from participants' responses to these areas.

The individual interview was conducted with a faʻafāfine participant in her early 20s who was in home detention following a short prison sentence. This interview occurred in the participant's own home and lasted several hours. The same questions and topics as in focus group discussions were explored. The participant contacted the first author seeking an opportunity to reflect on her schooling experiences as part of her own self-development. This interview offered an in-depth example of one person's experience of discrimination at school, and the traumatic and life changing effects it can have on an individual.

Findings

Experiences of bullying and physical assault

All participants described experiences of being either verbally insulted and/or physically assaulted at school. Many felt they were targeted because their gender expression as faʻafāfine or fakaleiti did not match the masculine performances esteemed by their school. Nadeen, recounted how she was physically assaulted on her way to the tuck shop because of a rumour about her romantic interest in another student's older brother.

> There was this tall guy, he was big for his age you know a big Pacific Islander, and he was stomping on my head and shit like that. It started all because of a rumour. I was walking to the tuck shop and out of the blue I get pushed to the ground and stomped in the head. I could of died!

Nadeen went on to explain how the school handled this incident,

> I got a hiding. I got beaten up by this guy and we were inside his [the Dean's] office. He's telling the boy not to do it again, no apology or anything. He [the boy] just gets up and goes out. And I am the one that gets stood down. That's how fucked up it was … (Transgender[4] woman, early twenties)

Nadeen's experience of being punished for this assault is congruent with that of transgender students in international research who also report school staff blaming them for any victimisation that occurs (Graham et al. 2014; Formby 2014). In Nadeen's case, she felt she was perceived as responsible for 'bringing it [the assault] on herself' by her feminine appearance, and that she was 'asking for trouble' by acting like a girl. Here, the school engages in a form of cisgenderism that manifests via a pathologisation of Nadeen's gender expression. 'Acting like a girl' by being attracted to another boy, is designated

as inappropriate in an all-boys' school, and therefore 'deserving' of punishment both by the boy who assaulted her and the school management who stood her down. For some participants, this tendency to 'blame the victim', had negative effects on their academic achievement, subsequently limiting future employment and educational opportunities.

Cisgenderism

Curriculum subjects

Areas of the school curriculum, such as Physical Education (PE) and religious studies, were identified by participants as particularly marginalising and non-inclusive. Changing rooms have been described as 'one of the most traumatic spaces' for queer and trans* students (Sykes 2011, 45). In this environment bodies can be scrutinised by others and, as these spaces are often unsupervised, bullying can occur (Devís-Devís et al. 2018). Many participants described getting changed for PE, and the way it was organised, as an ordeal which subsequently led to them avoiding, or dropping this subject.

> I stopped doing PE in year 9 ... I just always found excuses to go somewhere else because it would always be like rugby, and I dreaded that, 'oh we don't have enough bibs, half of you guys have to be shirtless' and I was just 'oh fuck that, I'm a lady!' Yeah it was horrible. Getting changed with the boys, I always had to have my own cubicle. In year 7 and 8 I did PE and I always had to have my own cubicle to get changed, and everyone is like 'what are you shy about?' That's the thing you know, 'this is not my body' and stuff. It's just that sport wasn't something I enjoyed either, because of that. (India, fakaleiti, early-20s).

Devís-Devís et al. (2018) indicate how trans* boys identify sports-based PE as their favourite subject because it provides opportunities to express masculinity and excel in activities they enjoy, while for trans* girls it can be negative and demotivating. Experiences such as India's echo those of trans* girls, in their discomfort around PE and fear of being exposed on the field (by being forced to go shirtless) and in the changing rooms. Although India could change in a private cubicle, this did not make her feel included, as it increased other boys' curiosity and singled her out as 'different'. Several forms of cisgenderism are in operation here. Forcing India to go shirtless is a cruel act that ignores her understanding that 'I'm a lady', and that within dominant discourses of femininity going topless is immodest. Failure to provide India with female changing rooms, is a form of marginalisation that denies her presence as fakaleiti. When only male changing rooms are provided, the existence of fakaleiti is refused, and India's gender identity is erased.

The school's extra-curricular sports policy was another area in which cisgenderism was experienced. Several participants wanted to play in sports teams but found the school's conditions of participation, which necessitated conforming to dominant performances of masculinity, inhibitory. The masculine performance demanded of players involved wearing a sports uniform, having a hairstyle and acting in a manner that was congruent with expectations of how boys should outwardly present. Natalya explained"

> We wanted to be involved so much, like we bluffed about how we loved sports so we joined soccer and all of that because we wanted too. We had the idea that we could do whatever we wanted to do, but then it always fell back to 'that if you want to do it, you have to do it this way' (Natalya, fa'afāfine, mid-20s)

The way in which Natalya and her friends styled their looks, in terms of make-up, nail polish, feminine hairstyles and clothes, sat uneasily with the school's idea of a boys' soccer team. When the school insisted, 'if you want to do it, you have to do it this way' (i.e. look like boys) they were not prepared to relinquish their femininity to join the team. This manifestation of cisgenderism is a form of binarising which assumes that a boys' soccer team looks and acts in ways that repudiate femininity. Participants were prevented from participating in sports teams, because their feminine gender expression contravened what was considered 'appropriately masculine' within this context.

The school participants attended was faith-based, comprising a community of devout families where religion had been a strong influence on students since birth. In focus groups, many participants began by talking about being deeply involved with religion throughout childhood. However, this connection was broken as they entered their early teens and began identifying as fa'afāfine or fakaleiti or sexually diverse. Many participants spoke of being rejected by the Church for being a 'disgrace' or an 'abomination'. Religious studies were compulsory for every student at every level, and therefore a constant and inescapable part of school life. Felicity's narrative captures participants' typical experience with religious studies.

> I really didn't listen in Religious Studies I just didn't get it. I hated going to that school because everyone uses their religion against you. They said, 'do you know, what you are is a sin' all the time and you know I was just tired. (Felicity, fa'afāfine, late-20s)

Pathologisation of non-binary expressions of gender and diverse sexualities as 'a sin' left Felicity disengaged from religious studies and feeling her gender expression was somehow 'abhorrent' and 'unacceptable'. She went on to explain, how this affected her personal relationship with God and made her question her own faith, 'I think it was used against us. I used to be like, "I believe in God" and then everyone said all this stuff and I'm, like, "is this really worth it, praying to you"? The marginalisation of fa'afāfine and fakaleiti in religious studies had serious consequences for participants' ability to experience their gender identity positively, resulting in a loss of faith and, potential community of support for several of them.

Toilets and uniforms

Cisgenderism was also experienced in relation to toilets and uniforms. As an all-boys school, student toilets accommodated for boys only. Participants frequently recounted being harassed or asked for sexual favours by other students when they went to the bathroom alone. They also recurrently commented on the problematics of cubicles being open at the top and bottom and that not all doors locked.

> So, I didn't really use the boy's bathroom. The only time I was there, I was in there with the girls [other fa'afāfine and fakaleiti] doing our make-up or catching up. But if I really needed to go, I would go to the nurses' office. I wouldn't say that's why I was there, I would say 'I am not feeling well oh and can I use the bathroom while I am here?' Yeah it was just horrible. (India, fakaleiti, early-20s)

India's experience of not having a safe toilet to use was described as 'just horrible' and likely to be physically uncomfortable. This narrative reveals the added indignity of having to feign an illness to use the unisex toilet at the nurses' office. Lack of suitable and safe

toilet facilities meant that basic human functions became moments of stress, with some participants not consuming fluids to avoid having to frequent the toilet during the day.

> Tori: So, speaking with [student name] she said she didn't drink anything at school during the day, so she didn't have to use the toilet. She would hold on until she got home. Is that true for you?
>
> Olivia: Yeah we used to do that sometimes. And if we had to go, we never went there alone. (fa'afāfine, late-20s)

A student that is anxious about using the bathroom, maybe unable to concentrate or physically operate at full capacity. Such experiences resonate with findings from Veale et al's (2019) survey which reported that over half (59%) of trans and non-binary students disagreed that it was safe to use the school toilet or changing room that matched their gender (p.62). This same survey also found that less than half of trans* and non-binary students had access to a unisex bathroom. Failure to provide students with a toilet that matches their gender, contravenes *The Human Rights Act 1993* in Aotearoa-New Zealand which prohibits discrimination on a diverse array of grounds, including 'gender' and 'sexual orientation'. Moreover, for participants who reported being harassed for sexual favours in toilets, the absence of unisex toilets indicates a failure to adhere to *National Administration Guideline 5 (a)* to, 'provide a safe physical and emotional environment for students'.

School dress codes and uniform regulations are a recognised area of discrimination for trans* students in the international literature (Jones et al. 2016; Robinson et al. 2014). In this study, participants described an occasion when school prefects petitioned the Board of Trustees to have fa'afāfine and fakaleiti students expelled because they were perceived as 'bringing shame on the school due to their feminine appearance'. As the only uniform option available was male, some participants endeavoured to feminise it by, wearing make-up and growing their hair long.

> When I was in Year 13, the prefects had a meeting with management and they told them that they wanted to get rid of us and we had to all cut our hair and no more make-up or we would be expelled from school. And that was something that the prefects were coming up to us and telling us, and certain staff members were saying yeah, but we never obliged. Because apparently if you be the way we are, we are encouraging younger ones to do the same thing. (Olivia, fa'afāfine, late-20s)

Participants felt they were confronted by a double standard whereby they were unfairly targeted and threatened with major punishment for seemingly minor infringements. For instance, other students who did not wear their uniform correctly, or, had non-regulation hairstyles, were not threatened with expulsion. Cisgenderism works here, by pathologising fa'afāfine and fakaleiti expressions of gender as bringing 'shame on the school' because they do not comply with masculine performance. Fa'afāfine and fakaleiti are constituted as pathological here via the implication that their expression of gender would 'contaminate' younger students and serve to 'recruit' them.

The annual School Ball was another moment that participants remembered as one where their gender expression was negated. Several wanted to wear dresses but were warned by the school management this was not allowed.

> The Ball was an issue. I remember our last Ball, our year 13 Ball was almost cancelled. I know some of the girls [fa'afāfine and fakaleiti] weren't going to come because we weren't allowed

to wear what we wanted to wear. Like obviously some of us wanted to wear dresses. And if we weren't allowed, then we weren't going to come because it's a school Ball … I think they were just like, the idea of wearing a dress to management was just wrong, and I don't understand why (Natalya, fa'afafine, mid-20s).

Natalya's comments illustrate how uniform regulations and pressure to conform to a gender specific physical appearance were cisgenderist. Within this environment, which promoted hegemonic forms of masculinity and disavowed femininity, Natalya and other participants' desire to express a feminine gender identity by wearing dresses was denied.

Discussion

The title of this article derives from an observation made by the first author during the time she was affiliated with the school the participants attended. We use it in the title to encapsulate in one succinct phrase, the cisgenderism present in participants' everyday experiences of schooling. Each day, when teachers said, 'Good morning boys', fa'afāfine and fakaleiti participants were misgendered and their identities erased. Constant repetition of this seemingly minor and mundane occurrence, was just one of the many cisgenderist practices participants routinely endured. Identifying and capturing these everyday practices of cisgenderism for fa'afāfine and fakaleiti students has been our main aim.

To conclude, we offer some suggestions for future policy and practice based on our findings that might enable schools to be more inclusive of fa'afāfine and fakaleiti students. These suggestions align with existing research that reports schools which support LGBTQ students with policies and curriculum that positively acknowledges gender and sexual diversity, can reduce victimisation and produce better school outcomes for these individuals (Bry et al. 2018). However, we add a caveat here. While providing appropriate toilets and offering flexible uniform options are positive changes, like Neary (2018), we believe ' … they do not necessarily interrupt or destabilise the ways that the restrictive sex/gender order is deeply embedded in the micro-politics of school life' (p.442). Achieving this goal is a much bigger, more complex and enduring project, that remains to be undertaken.

At the level of school policy in Aotearoa-New Zealand, schools have a responsibility to 'support and acknowledge diversity among students' and are urged to 'question gender stereotypes, and assumptions about sexuality' (Ministry of Education 2015, 11). Adhering to national educational policy about providing *all* students with a safe environment could be an important first step for schools in reducing these forms of discrimination. As findings from this study reveal, a current approach can be to blame fa'afāfine and fakaleiti students' expressions of femininity for attracting discrimination and, subsequently, punishing them for these incidents. Wider recognition of the kinds of cisgenderist schooling practices and processes that create a structurally unequal environment for fa'afāfine and fakaleiti is suggested. Initiatives can then be developed based on these specific inequitable structures and practices, that seek to disrupt them (Bartholomaeus and Riggs 2017).

Drawing school curricula into alignment with existing school policy around gender and sexual diversity is another suggestion to support fa'afāfine and fakaleiti students. The

Ministry of Education (2015) guidelines acknowledge that toilets can be unsafe environments for gender diverse students, and recommend schools provide them with safe spaces. Physical Education was a curriculum area that caused fa'afāfine and fakaleiti participants considerable angst in this study. One possibility for making Physical Education more inclusive might be to provide fa'afāfine and fakaleiti with a safe and private space in which to change. A safe changing and toilet space might include private lockable cubicles with appropriate teacher supervision to monitor student safety. How these spaces are named, could be decided in consultation with fa'afāfine and fakaleiti students so that they feel comfortable and their identities are appropriately acknowledged.

Physical Education and extra-curricular sports could also be more flexible in their delivery, enabling students to participate in activities and teams they feel comfortable in. Such flexibility would mean that fa'afāfine and fakaleiti students would not be expected to change their appearance to become more masculine, to join teams. It might also extend to providing options for students to choose a team that best matches their own gender. In an all-boys' school this could entail fa'afāfine and fakaleiti joining the sports teams of local girls' schools if they wish to play soccer or other sports competitively. In addition, finding ways of identifying team members that are not shameful or denigrating could be encouraged.

With regards to religious studies, an alternative to teaching that diverse gender and sexual identities are 'sinful', would be to emphasise the religious values of 'love', 'peace', and 'tolerance'. A study by Bry et al. (2018) found strategies like highlighting religious values favourable to diversity such as 'love' and 'tolerance', and reinterpreting religious texts, enabled some participants to stay connected to their religion. Teachers of religious studies might also benefit from professional development on LGBTQ issues, to enable interpretations of religious texts that are inclusive of gender and sexually diverse students.

The Ministry of Education (2015) guidelines on sexuality education recommend that gender-neutral and inclusive uniform choices be available for gender-diverse students. As participants attended an all-boys school, the school uniform was designed exclusively for boys. However, a possible concession here, might be to allow students to wear 'any type of black shoes' including those typically designated for women. Permitting ballet-type slippers or shoes with a small heel, would acknowledge the preference of fa'afāfine and fakaleiti for feminine attire and better affirm these students' gender identity. These suggestions are far from exhaustive and are best resolved in ways that meet the needs of fa'afāfine and fakaleiti in the specific schooling contexts they attend.

Conclusion

This article has aimed to contribute to an existing body of trans* students experiences of schooling in several ways. Firstly, it foregrounds the experiences of a specific group of fa'afāfine and fakaleiti students about which little has previously been documented. These groups share similar experiences of cisgenderism at school as trans* students in relation to their erasure, pathologisation and marginalisation in daily schooling structures and practices. What is distinctive about these experiences is the way they manifest as a consequence of the particular expression of fa'afāfine and fakaleiti

gender identity in an all-boys faith-based school. Importantly, being fa'afāfine and fakaleiti is a uniquely Samoan and Tongan cultural experience that is not entirely captured, nor expressed, by some western conceptualisations of the term trans*. What this study draws attention to is the intensely difficult position fa'afāfine and fakaleiti students experience when in an environment designated specifically for boys and within a faith-based context that does not generally embrace gender or sexual diversity.

Notes

1. The faith-base of this school cannot be disclosed to protect confidentiality.
2. We use the term trans* throughout this paper in place of 'transgender' or other terminology, where the asterix denotes the desire to be as inclusive as possible (see Neary 2018). When referring to the work of other scholars we use the terminology they employed in recognition of their preferences and the contextual specificities of their research.
3. A pseudonym
4. Nadeen is part-Samoan and identified as fa'afāfine throughout her schooling. Since leaving school she has identified as transgender.

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