

High School Experiences of Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Young Adults: A
Reflective Photovoice Study

by

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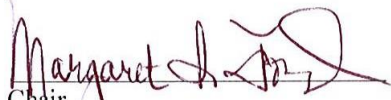
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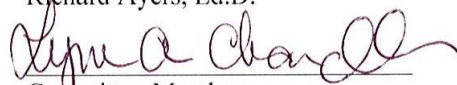
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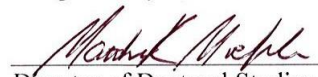
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ABSTRACT

Increasing numbers of high school students are identifying openly as transgender and gender nonconforming even as they navigate violence, discrimination, and harassment from peers and others. Many of the scholarly work on trans issues in education have positioned transgender and gender nonconforming students within the larger grouping of LGBTQ individuals. The purposes of this study are to (a) to clarify and document the needs and reflective experiences of transgender and gender nonconforming youth; (b) to determine the extent to which school policies at the federal, state, and local levels are meeting those needs; and (c) to utilize input from participants in support of school, community, and policy changes. I utilized the qualitative research methodology of photovoice and aspects of phenomenology, allowing participants to tell their high school stories through photography and personal reflection. By highlighting the lived experiences and related issues facing our transgender and gender non-conforming youth, my purpose was to highlight the need for a change in policies related to transgender students in our schools.

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I wish to acknowledge and thank my committee—Dr. M. Ford, Dr. R. Ayers, and Dr. L. Murray Chandler—for believing in and supporting my ideas. Thank you for challenging the way I think.

To my courageous participants: Thank you for your bravery and for sharing your intimate stories, histories, and experiences. You have inspired me to stand up and speak out. Your photographs and stories have changed me forever. I hope this work will affect changes for all marginalized students and that your courage will help others to speak out against oppression and injustice.

I would also like to acknowledge the 2015 cohort, the Blue Angels. Each of my seven colleagues has helped me grow, learn, and soar to new heights. I would not have been able to complete this program without your continued love and support.

DEDICATION

This labor of love is dedicated to those whose stories have not yet been told. There is someone out there who would love to hear their stories.

To my husband, Larry, thank you for your unwavering love and support.

To my children—you are never too old to fulfill your dreams.

To my parents for teaching me about hard work and perseverance.

To my colleagues thank you for your support and for lifting me up when I was down.

To all my students past and present—you may have seen me as your teacher, but you were the ones teaching me. Thank you.

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PREFACE

The basis for this research study is the passion that I have for social justice. I have been teaching high school social studies for thirty-two years, and during that time, I have seen many changes. One of the most recent changes has been a large number of students “coming out” as transgender and gender nonconforming. Teachers need to understand that their actions can validate and engage students or that they can perpetuate prejudice and discrimination (Hollins, 1999). When my high school created a gender-neutral bathroom, I heard teachers say, “Why do those students need a separate bathroom? They should just use the nurse’s office.” On another occasion, when I encountered several teachers who were in the hall between periods to monitor students, a colleague of mine said, “That he/she should decide what it is.” I asked the teacher why he had such a negative attitude and he said, “This transgender thing is a fad; these kids don’t know what they want.”

The most important experience brought me to this study was a more personal one. Several years ago, a student transitioned from female to male during the summer between junior and senior year. When school started in September one of his teachers went around asking the student’s former teachers what the student’s name was before transitioning. When I asked her why, she responded that she was just curious, but once that information was obtained, the teacher spent the rest of the school year misgendering the student. Witnessing these acts of bias made me want to research other lived experiences to help shed light on issues that transgender and gender nonconforming high school students face.

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Queer (transitioning, transgender, and gender-nonconforming) high school students face a multitude of issues when trying to become or be their true or “authentic self, the person who we feel we truly are” (Reis, 2004). Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ) scholarship and research since the 1970s has gone beyond discussions of victimization and violence and turned to curriculum and pedagogy. Transgender history and development have been studied in the professional literature for several decades (Beemyn, 2006; Doan, 2010; Hill, 2007; Kando, 1972). According to Reis (2004), “Transgender is a modern expression, used most often as an umbrella term encompassing a broad range of gender-bending practices, including cross-dressing, transsexuality, drag performativity, and the like” (p.166 - 177). The transgender movement is still young, and the current research centers on a transgender person’s ability to live daily as their true selves while navigating the negativity associated with being transgender (Kando, 1972). Doan (2010) highlighted the different and disconnected forms of masculine and feminine (gender binary) identities in society that create barriers to transgender and gender nonconforming individuals’ ability to present as their true selves.

The current academic literature surrounding transgender and gender creative individuals is limited, however, and much of the existing research has concentrated on the experiences of young adults on college campuses (Bockting, Miner, & Rosser, 2007; Crawford, 2008; Doan, 2007; Drumheller & McQuay, 2010; Eliason & Hughes, 2004; Hill, 2007; Kazyak, 2011; Hill 2007). The limited available research does not deal specifically with transgender, transitioning,

and gender nonconforming students at the elementary and secondary school levels and their experiences with curriculum, instruction, classroom and school climate, administrators, staff, and teachers. The research that does exist centers on the broad range of LGTBQ issues and experiences. Since LGBTQ is an umbrella term, studies have tended to generalize the experiences of individuals under this umbrella (Quinn & Meiners, 2011). Other available research “finds that transgender students often feel marginalized and experience high rates of discrimination” (McKinney, 2005, p. 2), bullying, feelings of alienation, and violence.

The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Educators Network (GLSEN) has stated that, at the secondary level, transgender and gender nonconforming youth experience the highest rates of bullying in schools, including cyberbullying (GLSEN, 2015). The 2015 National School Climate Report found that 85% of LGBTQ students have “experienced verbal harassment (e.g., called names or threatened) at school based on a personal characteristic and most commonly sexual orientation” (GLSEN, 2015). In response to the problem, some researchers have discussed the need for a transgender and gender nonconforming pedagogy and proposed ways that underprepared teachers, administrators, and schools can mediate learning that affirms, creates, and sustains classrooms of recognition for all students (Jennings 2014; Quinn & Meiners, 2011; Miller, 2016). Schools in general and curriculum, in particular, need to be not only culturally diverse but also gender inclusive, especially in the humanities (art, music, history, and ELA). GLSEN’s National School Climate research shows that LGBTQ students experience safer and more positive school environments when they are taught positive representations of LGBTQ people, history, and events in the school curriculum. Other marginalized groups are already portrayed in school curricula. New York State’s new Social Studies framework (2016) includes the following guidelines:

Table 1

New York State Social Studies Guidelines

Grade	Social Studies Practices	Students will
Kindergarten	<p>Developing a child’s sense of self.</p> <p>Identify similarities and/or differences between him/her and others.</p> <p>Demonstrate respect for the rights of others.</p> <p>Identify situations in which social actions are required. (p. 10)</p>	<p>Each person is unique but also shares common characteristics with other family, school, and community members.</p> <p>K 2a Students will identify characteristics of themselves that are similar to their classmates. (NYSED, 2017 p. 16)</p>
First Grade	<p>Identify similarities and/or differences between him/her and others with detail.</p> <p>Identify situations in which social actions are required. (p. 10)</p>	<p>Language, beliefs, customs, and traditions help shape the identity and culture of a family and a community.</p> <p>1.1a Families are a basic unit of all societies, and different people define family differently. – Students will listen to stories about different families and will identify characteristics that are the same and different.</p> <p>1.1b People and families of diverse racial, religious, national, and ethnic groups share their beliefs, customs, and traditions, which creates a multicultural community. – Students will identify traditions that are associated with their families and tell why these traditions are important.</p> <p>1.1c Awareness of America’s rich diversity fosters intercultural understanding. – Students will compare the cultural similarities and differences between various ethnic and cultural groups found in New York State. (p. 23)</p>
Second Grade	<p>Demonstrate respect for the rights of others in discussions and classroom debates, regardless of whether one agrees with the other viewpoints.</p> <p>Identify situations in which social actions are required. (p. 10)</p>	<p>2.2b A community is strengthened by the diversity of its members, with ideas, talents, perspectives, and cultures that can be shared across the community. – Students will explore how different ideas, talents, perspectives, and culture are shared across their community.</p> <p>2.3a The United States is founded on the democratic principles of</p>

		equality, fairness, and respect for authority and rules. – Students will explore democratic principles, such as dignity for all, equality, fairness, and respect for authority and rules, and how those principles are applied to their community. (p. 32)
Fifth Grade	Demonstrate respect for the rights of others in discussions, regardless of whether one agrees with the other viewpoints. (p. 67)	5.6c Across time and place, different groups of people in the Western Hemisphere have struggled and fought for equality and civil rights or sovereignty. – Students will examine at least one group of people, such as Native Americans, African Americans, women, or another cultural, ethnic, or racial minority in the Western Hemisphere, who have struggled or are struggling for equality and civil rights or sovereignty. (p. 77)
Eighth Grade	Demonstrate respect for the rights of others in discussions and classroom debates; respectfully disagree with other viewpoints. Use techniques and strategies to be an active and engaged member of class discussions of fellow classmates' views and statements. (p. 67)	8.9b the civil rights movement prompted renewed efforts for equality by women and other groups. – Students will examine struggles for equality and factors that enabled or limited success on behalf of women, farm workers, Native Americans, the disabled, and the LGBT community. (p. 109)
Eleventh Grade	<p>Civic Participation</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Demonstrate respect for the rights of others in discussions and classroom debates; respectfully disagree with other viewpoints and provide evidence for a counter-argument. 2. Participate in activities that focus on a classroom, school, community, state, or national issue or problem. 3. Explain differing philosophies of social and political participation and the role of the individual leading to group-driven philosophies. 4. Identify, describe, and contrast the roles of the individual in opportunities for social and political participation in different societies. 5. Participate in persuading, debating, negotiating, and compromising in the resolution of conflicts and differences. 6. Identify situations in which social actions are required and determine an appropriate course of action. 7. Work to influence those in positions of power to strive for extensions of freedom, social justice, and human rights. 8. Fulfill social and political responsibilities associated with citizenship in a democratic society and interdependent global community 	<p>11.10b Individuals, diverse groups, and organizations have sought to bring about change in American society through a variety of methods;</p> <p>“will trace the following efforts in terms of issues/goals, key individuals and groups, and successes/limitations”; included in this list of efforts are people with disabilities, the rights of the accused, immigration, gay rights and the LGBT movement, the environment, and student rights. (pp. 43–44)</p>

	by developing awareness of and/or engaging in the political process. (p. 3)	
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Data from the California Safe Schools Coalition 2004–2006 Preventing School Harassment (PSH) survey illustrated “the importance of LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum on student safety. Surveyed students that learned about LGBTQ people or issues as part of a classroom lesson were more likely to feel safer, more likely to report a stronger sense of school belonging, and less likely to report being harassed based on sexual orientation or gender identity.” Unfortunately, the data were incomplete because they did not state what “kinds of LGBTQ-inclusive lessons students were learning in school, or in what classes students were most likely to learn about LGBTQ topics. The data did not reveal what types of lessons and in which classes inclusion most effectively impacts school safety” (Russell et al., 2006).

Given the political and social climate of today, there is a tremendous need for additional research on transgender, transitioning, and gender nonconforming youth at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Transgender individuals, like many marginalized groups, face oppression and lack trans-positive support both in school and out. Many transgender youths experience sexual assault and violence at rates higher than the general population. In the first six months of the year 2016, approximately one hundred and sixty-six transgender persons were murdered worldwide (Balzer, 2016). In August of 2017, the Hate Violence Report recorded nineteen hate-violence related homicides of transgender and gender non-conforming people compared to nineteen reports for the entire year of 2016 (Water, 2017). Schools should provide a welcoming environment in which every student feels part of a community and is encouraged to learn:

To learn, children and adolescents need to feel safe and supported. Without these conditions, the mind reverts to a focus on survival. Educators in high-performing, high-poverty schools have long recognized the critical importance of providing a healthy, safe, and supportive classroom and school environment. (Parrett, 2012)

In 2015, the United States federal government passed *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015). This act was a reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Schools Act* (1965), which provided for equal education for all students. The reauthorization included provisions to ensure success for all students and schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Educators today have been charged with caring for and protecting all students in our schools and classrooms, leaving us with the challenge of how to promote diversity and equality in a time of change. According to the National Education Association (NEA) “diversity can be defined as the sum of the ways that people are both alike and different. The dimensions of diversity include race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language, culture, religion, mental and physical ability, class, and immigration status” (NEA, 2018).

In May of 2015, the Obama administration updated Title IX to include transgender and gender nonconforming students. Title IX (1972) is a comprehensive federal law that protects all students from discrimination (S.C. Â§1681 et seq). The legislation stated that “a student's gender identity will be considered that student's sex when it comes to enforcing federal law and those transgender students must be permitted to use bathrooms that align with their gender identity” (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). After the election of President Trump, the new administration issued a new set of guidelines that changed the Obama-era protections allowing transgender students to use the bathrooms and locker rooms that correspond with their gender

identities. In February of 2017, Betsy DeVos stated that Title IX “is an issue best solved at the state and local level. Schools, communities, and families can find—and in many cases, have found—solutions that protect all students” (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Background of Problem

According to Cichosz-King, meanwhile, many in the LGBTQ community see transgender and gender nonconforming individuals as not belonging to the mainstream gay culture. These individuals, in other words, not only face discrimination from the straight community but they also face discrimination by the LGBTQ community:

Youth who live outside the gender binary and challenge traditionally entrenched forms of gender expression, such as transgender and gender non-conforming youth, experience a double consciousness. Trans and gender non-conforming youth strive and yearn to be positively recognized by peers, teachers, and family members; they experience macroaggressions because of their systemic reinforcement and are forced to placate others by representing themselves in incomplete or false ways that they believe will be seen as socially acceptable to survive a school day. (Miller, 2013, p.12 - 13)

According to GLSEN’s 2015 National School Climate Survey, about “three-quarters of LGBTQ students (74%) reported feeling unsafe at school, more than half (57%) reported feeling unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation, [and] four in ten students (43%) felt unsafe because of how they expressed their gender” (p. 4). Many in the trans community not only suffer from discrimination but they often face violence and the denial of basic human rights, liberty, and freedom. They are also confronted with stigmatization and exclusion by their peers, teachers,

administration, and school staff. In her book *In Broken Images: Feminist Tales for Different Teacher Education*, Erica McWilliams (1995) states,

in general, the culture of teacher education has shown itself to be highly resistant to new ways of conceiving knowledge, and issues of race, class, culture, gender, and ecology will continue to be marginalized while the teacher education curriculum is located in Eurocentric and androcentric knowledge and practices. (p. 61)

Classrooms and schools help students to shape how they see themselves and others, and “[c]lassrooms that fail to affirm students’ (a)gender diversity can contribute to students’ disconnection from and desire to participate in learning” (Miller, 2016, p. 30). To create diverse and responsive classrooms, teachers need to “practice using the terms gay, lesbian, transsexual, bisexual, transgender and use them naturally in context to reduce the stigma associated with the words” (Daniel, 2007, p.75-80). When school culture does not support the needs of all students, it “forces students who fall outside of the dominant identifiers to focus on simple survival rather than on success and fulfillment in school” (Miller, 2016, p. 6).

As more adolescents and children “come out” about being transgender or gender non-conforming, it becomes more important for teachers, staff, school administrators, and communities to realize that all children deserve to be their true selves and have their individual needs met. In May of 2016, former Education Secretary John King stated,

No student should ever have to go through the experience of feeling unwelcome at school or on a college campus; gender identity is protected under Title IX.

Many educators want to do the right thing for their students, but many of them have personal biases that interfere with the way they teach and speak with transgender, transitioning, and gender creative students. Educators need to ensure

that students know that whoever they are or wherever they come from, they can get a great education in an environment free from discrimination, harassment, and violence. (U.S. Department of Education, 2016)

According to the 2015 National School Climate Survey, “overall rates of homophobic and transphobic harassment are still higher than anyone should be willing to accept and discrimination against LGBTQ people is widespread” (GLSEN, 2015, p.xi). The students who were surveyed in that study faced such discrimination personally. Students that have faced this type of gender discrimination and victimization are “twice as likely to report that they did not plan to pursue post-secondary education. Further, when targeted at school, gender-expansive youth perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) face long-term effects on their mental health and life satisfaction as young adults” (GLSEN, 2015, p. xv-xxv).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming youth. Students who are negotiating sexual and gender identities outside the norm face additional challenges (Beemyn, 2003; Bilodeau, 2005; Harley, Nowak, Gassaway, & Savage, 2002). Transgender and gender non-conforming students face peers, teachers, and staff who are not aware of proper pronoun use and correct transgender terminology, for example. Further, these students often encounter peers and adults who have little or no knowledge of the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity. They also face hostility, discrimination, and violence. According to Harbin (2016),

Cultivating a gender-inclusive classroom environment requires a familiarity with an array of concepts related to gender identity and expression.

Consequently, efforts to promote a gender-inclusive environment require both consciousness raising and learning opportunities for students and leaders in the classroom. In particular, there are three conceptual distinctions that are crucial to understanding when working to construct a gender-inclusive classroom.

(p.1-11)

To help promote that consciousness, this study was conducted to give transgender and gender non-conforming eighteen to twenty years old students the opportunity to reflect on their high school experiences through photographs and interviews.

The data was gathered to give voice to the needs of transgender and gender nonconforming students. Previous studies have shown that middle and high school students are at risk for victimization at school when they do not conform to gender norms (Aspenlieder, Buchanan, McDougall, & Sipplola, 2009; Wyss, 2004) or sexuality (D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2006). As more students come out as transgender and gender non-conforming, the risk of victimization increases. Schools, teachers, and policy makers, therefore, need to identify the risk factors and implementation strategies to promote positive school climates with the goal of increasing perceptions and experiences of safety at school (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003) as well as inclusion for all students.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical foundation is necessary for all research studies, particularly in qualitative research that uses inductive reasoning (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Miles and Huberman (1994) described the importance of building a theoretical foundation in qualitative research and using mind-mapping techniques to represent the link between the theoretical foundation and the conceptual framework. The theoretical framework

used for this study was based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Queer Theory, and Paulo Freire's Empowerment Education Theory.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Individuals have a desire to achieve certain goals, and achieving these goals helps humans to satisfy their specific needs and desires. The main theory used in this study was Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow categorized human needs into a hierarchy. In that hierarchy, certain needs must be met before others (Maslow, 1943; see Figure 1).

At the bottom of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs pyramid are physiological needs. Physiological needs include all the foundational needs that support human existence: air, food supply, water, sleep, etc. As needs in the lowest order are satisfied, individuals are able to progress to the higher orders. According to Maslow, one "peculiar characteristic of the human organism when it is dominated by a certain need is that the whole philosophy of the future tends also to change" (Maslow, 1943, p. 374). When physiological needs are met, individuals may ignore them and move up to the next level. The second level in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is the need for safety. Safety needs include the need for a safe and secure environment as well as personal welfare. The next level up the pyramid of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is the need for love. At this level, people desire love, affection, and acceptance. They want to be welcomed and treasured by their friends, family, and lovers. The fourth level in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is esteem. Maslow (1943) divided the need for esteem into two parts: (a) the need for achievement, confidence, independence, and freedom; and (b) the need for reputation, prestige, recognition, attention, importance, and appreciation (pp. 381–382). For Maslow, self-actualization is the ultimate goal of human life. Self-actualization means fulfilling what one is

born or called to be and reaching one's maximum capacity. Different people have different life aspirations, and their self-actualization desires are distinctive as well.

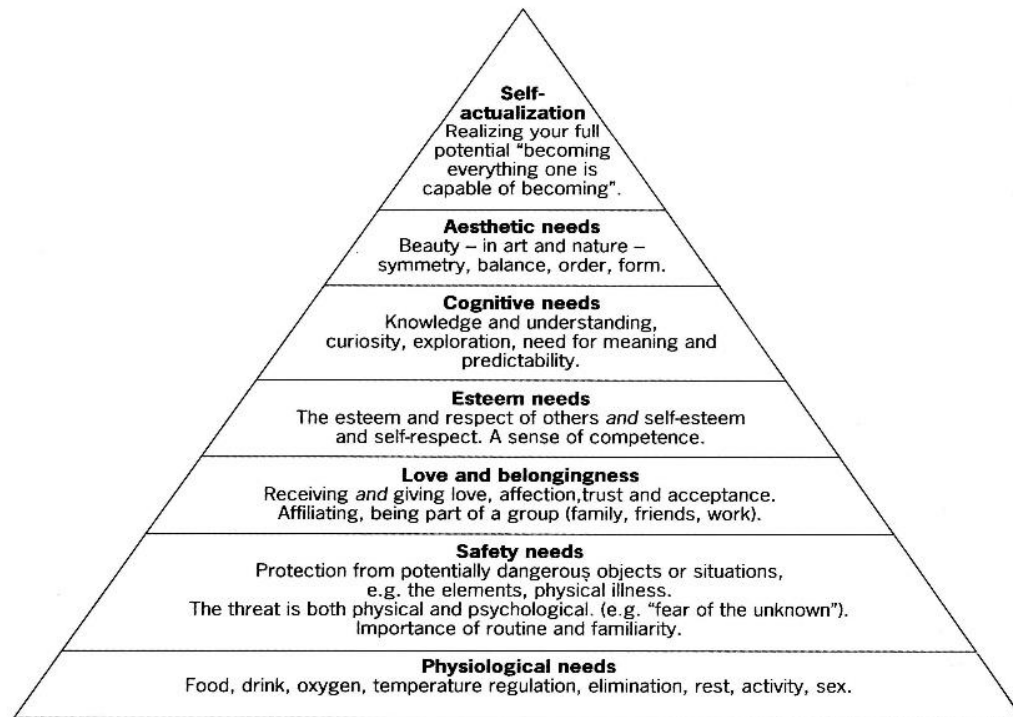


Figure 1. Maslow's hierarchy of needs. *Note.* This figure illustrates Maslow's hierarchy. Maslow suggests that people are motivated to fulfill basic needs before moving on to other, more advanced needs Maslow (1943, 1954)

Maslow (1943) stated that "a musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately happy. What a man can be, he must be" (p. 10). The hierarchy of needs is fluid and different for all. Maslow explained that "this hierarchy is not nearly as rigid as we may have implied. It is true that most of the people with whom we have worked have seemed to have these basic needs in about the order that has been indicated. However, there have been a number of exceptions" (p. 386). Unique personal circumstances or past experiences may cause individuals to value one type of need over others regardless of its order in the hierarchy pyramid.

More recently, scholars have reviewed and validated Maslow's theory (Arkes & Garseke 1982; Hollyford & Whiddett, 1999; Reeve, 2005). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs was based on the principle of pre-potency—the idea that when the lower need is gratified, the person focuses attention on higher needs (Maslow, 1954, 1987). Arkes and Garseke (1982, p.125) described this as the “chronological gratification” of needs. The basic lower needs are those that are biologically necessary while the higher needs are those that are necessary for psychological growth. For this study, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs was applied to gain an understanding of the reflective lived experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming youth and how their high school experiences supported or inhibited their individual needs.

According to Maslow, when physiological needs are gratified, safety needs become pronounced. Safety needs include the need for security, stability, protection, and freedom from fear, anxiety, and chaos (Maslow 1954). Maslow argued that people feel unsafe when life is endangered and that the motivation for safety is especially activated during emergencies such as war, natural catastrophe, societal, and economic disorder, including the breakdown of authority (Maslow 1954; Maslow 1987). Maslow also suggested that children are affected when they live in environments that appear to be unstructured, disorganized, or disrupted with injustice, inconsistency, unfairness, or interrupted routines (Arkes & Garseke, 1982; Maslow, 1987b).

In GLSEN's 2015 National School Climate Survey, 10,528 students between the ages of 13 and 21 from all 50 states and the District of Columbia and from 3,095 unique school districts were surveyed. About two-thirds of the sample (68.6%) was White, a third (34.9%) was cisgender female, and about half identified as gay or lesbian (49.2%). The results of this study showed that safety is a major concern for LGBTQ youth.

- Twenty-seven percent of LGBTQ students were physically harassed (e.g., pushed or shoved) in the past year because of their sexual orientation and twenty percent because of their gender expression.
- Thirteen percent of LGBTQ students were physically assaulted (e.g., punched, kicked, injured with a weapon) in the past year because of their sexual orientation and nine percent because of their gender expression.
- Forty-eight percent of LGBTQ students experienced electronic harassment in the past year (via text messages or postings on Facebook), often known as cyberbullying.
- Fifty-nine percent of LGBTQ students were sexually harassed (e.g., unwanted touching or sexual remarks) in the past year at school.
- Fifty-seven percent of LGBTQ students who were harassed or assaulted in school did not report the incident to school staff, most commonly because they doubted that effective intervention would occur, or the situation could become worse if reported.
- Sixty-three percent of the students who did report an incident said that school staff did nothing in response or told the student to ignore it. (GLSEN, 2015)

Reeve's (2005) theory of needs, a modification of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, classifies needs into three categories: physiological, psychological, and social needs. Reeve and Maslow agree that physiological needs are biologically induced. Reeve differed from Maslow when he suggested that failure to satisfy physiological needs has psychological consequences. The GLSEN 2015 National School Climate Survey reported that LGBTQ students

- were more than three times as likely to have missed school in the past month as those who had not (44% versus 12%);

- had lower GPAs than their peers;
- were more likely to have been disciplined at school (46% versus 27%);
- had lower self-esteem and school belonging and higher levels of depression;
- more often did not plan to finish high school (32%) or were unsure if they would finish, indicating that they were considering dropping out because of the hostile climate created by gendered school policies and practices; and
- were more than three times as likely to have missed school in the past month than those who experienced lower levels of harassment (62% versus 20%). (xvii)

In the words of GLSEN's 2015 National School Climate Survey, "a hostile school climate affects students' academic success and mental health, and "LGBTQ students who experience victimization and discrimination at school have worse educational outcomes and poorer psychological well-being" (xviii). Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory is relevant to this study because it helps to explore the needs of transgender and gender nonconforming youth.

Queer Theory

Queer theory refers not to identity but to a body of theories that critically analyze "the meaning of identity, focusing on intersections of identities and resisting oppressive social constructions of sexual orientation and gender" (Abes & Kasch, 2007, p. 620). Queer theory is built upon the post-structural theories of Foucault (1976/1978), Derrida (1967/1978), and Lyotard (1984). In Sullivan's (2003) words, "Post structural theorists such as Foucault argue that there are no objective and universal truths, but that particular forms of knowledge, and the ways of being that they engender, become 'naturalized' in culturally and historically specific ways" (p. 39). Queer Theory initially appeared in the 1990s at the height of the AIDS crisis in the United States, which significantly affected feminist and gay communities as well as the social and

political views surrounding these communities. Eve Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), among the earliest texts in queer theory, questions the binary structure of heterosexuality/homosexuality and culturally constructed ideas of gender. Sedgwick and Butler began the movement of questioning the social, political, and cultural structures that perpetuate individual identities that appear outside the norm. Sedgwick wrote that "the extent, construction and meaning, and especially the history of any such theoretical continuity, not to mention its consequences for practical politics, must be open to every interrogation" (88). As Pinar (1998) noted, queer theory migrated from language and literary studies to education, which is "a highly conservative and often reactionary field" (p. 2).

Queer Theory has been used to examine the context of gender and sexuality in society (Butler, 2003), history, sociology, women's studies, cultural studies (Creet, 2000; Maynard, 1999), advertising and business (Kates, 1999), television and pop culture (Kerry, 2009), the performing arts (Sennett & Bay-Cheng, 2002), and rural lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations (Kazyak, 2011). Queer theory focuses on individual identity and self-determination (Brown, 2012; Garry, 2011; Hill, 2007; McNeil, 2010; Olive & Thorpe, 2011). In her book *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler (1990) stated that feminism had made the mistake of trying to assert that women were a group with common characteristics and interests. Feminism, according to Butler, reinforced a binary view of gender relations that divided humans into two clear-cut groups: men and women. Queer theory offers a concept of sexuality that is more fluid and unstable, allowing for complex and changing sexual identities wherein individuals can see themselves in different places at different times. Judith Butler (1991) argued that "compulsory heterosexuality presumes

that there is first a sex that is expressed through a gender and then through a sexuality” while “it may now be necessary fully to invert and displace that operation of thought” (p. 29).

Queer theory is utilized in many disciplines, from social science to the humanities, but in education, “queer theorists seek to disrupt ‘normalizing’ discourses” (Tierney & Dilley, 1998, p. 61) such as those that have been used historically to police teachers, students, and administrators at all levels of education. Renn (2010) asserted that “among education researchers, LGBTQ, queer, and queer theory are contested terms, and the prevalence and quality of LGBTQ and queer scholarship varies across fields within education research” (p. 132).

Queer theory contradicts the practice of normalcy enforced by socially established norms. Butler (2004) noted that a norm operates within social practices as the implicit standard of normalization (p. 41). In society, norms are established through social behaviors. For example, students come to understand normative behaviors for girls and boys in health class with units on such topics as sexual health or puberty, which are often delivered within a heteronormative framework. In the book *It's Perfectly Normal*, Harris (1994) attempted to widen student's understandings of sexuality, attraction, and gender, stressing that a wide range of aspects of sexual health, changing bodies, heterosexual desire, and homosexual desire are natural and normal. Children and young adults are continually navigating the parameters of what is normal as they attempt to stay inside the boundaries of what is considered acceptable behavior and not be labeled as different. It is unfortunate that students learn early in their educations how to self-regulate their performance of social norms to ensure they blend into the crowd. Butler's discussion of gender as a social construction and performance has important implications for how gender is understood and how discourses of normalcy are maintained in education contexts (p. 402).

In this study, which addressed the experiences of transgender and gender nonconforming individuals, queer theory was used to explore the issues surrounding transgender and gender nonconforming youth and the impact that these issues have on their educations. Queer Theory addresses the “interaction of language and action, self and social identity, power and difference, experience and what is taken for knowledge, and the function of institutions to ensure equity beyond tolerance of representation” (Tierney & Dilley, 1998, p. 64).

Empowerment Education Theory

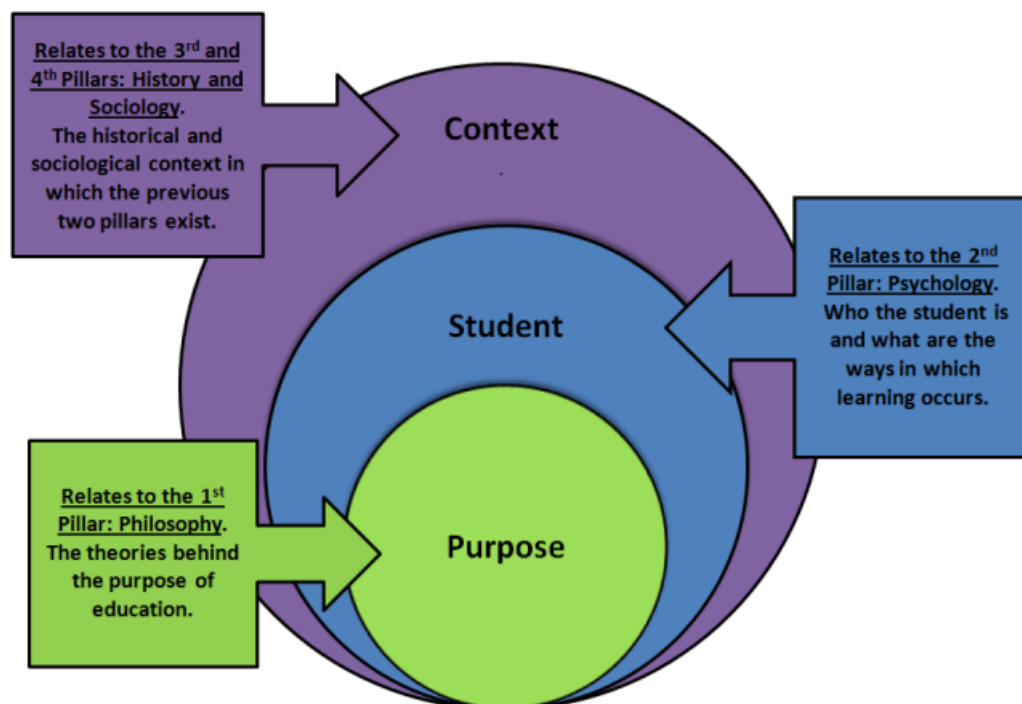


Figure 2. Empowerment Education Theory (Freire, 1970).

Another theoretical and practical underpinning of this study was Paulo Freire’s empowerment education theory (see Figure 3). Freire’s (1970) empowerment education theory encourages individuals to become vocal about the needs of their community. As an educator in the 1950s, Freire began a successful literacy and political consciousness program for the poor people living in shanty towns in Brazil (Wallerstein & Bernstein, 1988). Concerned with social change, he believed in the importance of a critical consciousness whereby people become aware

of the social, political, and economic issues in their lives and take action against the forces holding them back. Freire's methods created a concept of popular literacy education for personal and social liberation (Gibson, 1999). His process of empowerment education places emphasis on activism at the individual, organizational, and community levels. As individuals become more passionate about improving the well-being of their communities, their self-image will change as well (Wang, 1994). A community can be a classroom, a school, a district, or a state to which adults and young people bring individual life experiences, current pressures, and future expectations. Freire's approach has empowered marginalized individuals to examine their potential roles as self-liberators and to collaborate in community efforts toward social change. One of Freire's main ideas is that education is not neutral because it takes place within the context of people's lives. According to Freire, all pedagogy is a call to action for change and social justice. Freire also believed that knowledge is always actively manufactured in dialogue (Roberts, 1999): "The dynamic relationship between knower and known isn't just an unreflective being-in-the-world, but an active consciousness involving the deliberate use of the imagination, the emotions, and the ability to conjecture and compare" (Joldersma, 2001, p. 134). According to Freire, the purpose of education should be individual liberation that empowers learners as both subjects and actors in their own lives and within society (Wallerstein & Bernstein, 1988).

Freire insisted on situating educational activity in the lived experiences of students (Taylor, 1993). This is because, as he argued, "In the culture of silence, the masses are mute, that is, they are prohibited from creatively taking part in the transformation of their society and therefore prohibited from being" (Freire, 1985, p. 50). Freire argued that since knowledge comes from the powerful, marginalized individuals are left voiceless. Freire emphasized the collective knowledge that comes from shared experiences and understanding the social influences that

affect their lives (Wallerstein & Bernstein, 1988). Empowerment education teaches more than individual development: it is directed at individual change, quality of life, and social justice.

Freire's concept of empowerment was applied in this study, the use of participant photographs illuminated the shared experiences of the participants (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 370). These visual images will serve as a tool to enable educators and others to think critically about their schools and reveal the everyday social and political realities that influence the lives of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals in their educational community. For this study, the community is the school (Freire, 1970).

Similarly, Freire (1973) used line drawings and photographs that represented realities or "coded situation-problems." The visual images collected in this study could inspire other groups to critically analyze the social relations and conditions within their communities. The photographs may also fuel critical consciousness and collective action by making political statements about the reality of the lived experiences of transgender and gender nonconforming youth.

Research Questions

- How do transgender and gender non-conforming young adults perceive their experiences in public secondary school?

Sub Questions

- How do transgender and gender non-conforming students encounter policies and practices that they perceive to be inclusive of their marginalized status? How do they believe that these policies and practices fail to protect their rights?
- How do transgender and gender non-conforming students perceive school culture supporting or inhibiting their needs?

Definition of Terms

Defining the term “transgender” is problematic because of the common confusion between the terms “gender” and “sexuality.” Below is a list of terms used in this research as they are commonly defined in the academic literature.

Ally: Any non-lesbian, non-gay man, non-bisexual, or cisgender person whose attitude and behavior are anti-heterosexist and who is proactive in working toward combating homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism on both the personal and institutional levels.

Assigned Gender: The gender one is presumed or expected to embody based on sex as determined at birth.

Assigned pronouns: The commonly accepted pronouns that others use to describe or refer to a person based on actual or perceived gender.

Bigender: Refers to those who have masculine and feminine sides to their personalities. This is often a term used by, or to describe, cross dressers. It should not be confused with the term *two-spirit*, which is specifically a term used by Native Americans.

Gender: Socially constructed roles, behaviors, and attributes considered by the general public to be appropriate for one’s sex as assigned at birth. Gender roles vary among cultures and time continuums.

Gender binary: A system of viewing gender as consisting solely of two categories (“woman” and “man”) that are biologically based (“female” and “male”) and deemed unchangeable, and no other possibilities for gender or anatomy are believed to exist. This system is oppressive to anyone who defines their birth assignment, but particularly to those who are gender variant people and do not fit neatly into one of the two categories.

Gender creative: Expressing gender in a way that demonstrates individual freedom of expression and that does not conform to any gender.

Gender dysphoria: An intense and persistent discomfort with the primary and secondary sex characteristics of one's assigned birth sex. Affirming and supporting a person's gender identity can help to significantly decrease their dysphoria. Conversely, rejecting or requiring a person to conceal their gender identity exacerbates their level of dysphoria.

Gender expression: External manifestations of gender expressed through a person's name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behavior, voice, and body characteristics. Society identifies these cues as masculine and feminine, although what is considered masculine or feminine changes over time and varies by culture. Typically, transgender people seek to align their gender expression with their gender identity rather than with the sex they were assigned at birth (GLSEN).

Gender identity: A person's internal, deeply held sense of their gender. For transgender people, their own internal gender identity does not match the sex they were assigned at birth. Most people have the gender identity of "man" or "woman" (or "boy" or "girl"). For some people, their gender identity does not fit neatly into one of those two choices (see the definitions of non-binary and genderqueer). Unlike gender expression, gender identity is not necessarily visible to others (GLSEN).

Chosen gender: The gender one feels most comfortable with embodying and with which one most closely identifies.

Chosen pronouns or preferred gender pronouns: The pronouns that one feels most comfortable being used when they are spoken or referred to. Examples might include "ze," "per," "they," or "hir."

Cis gender or cissexual: A person who, by nature or by choice, conforms to the gender-based expectations of society (also referred to as “gender straight” or “gender normative”). The prefix “cis” is of Latin origin, meaning “on the same side (as).” Cisgender individuals have a gender identity that is aligned with their birth sex and, therefore, have self-perceptions and gender expressions that match the behaviors and roles considered appropriate for their birth sex.

GLSEN: Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network

Heteronormative/Heteronormativity: Culture or belief system in which people are assumed to fall into distinct and complementary sexes and genders and in which heterosexuality is deemed the normal sexual orientation. A heteronormative view is one that involves an alignment between biological sex, sexuality, gender identity, and gender roles.

Heterosexism: The assumption that all people are or should be heterosexual. Heterosexism excludes the needs, concerns, and life experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people while it gives advantages to heterosexual people. It is often a subtle form of oppression that reinforces realities of silence and suppresses individuality.

Homonormative/Homonormativity: The assimilation of heteronormative ideals and constructs into LGBT culture and identity. Homonormativity upholds neoliberalism rather than critiquing monogamy, procreation, normative family social roles, and binary gender roles. It is criticized as undermining citizens’ rights and erasing the historic alliance between radical politics and gay politics. Its core concern is sexual freedom.

Homophobia: The fear, dislike, and hatred of same-sex relationships or of individuals who love and are sexually attracted to those of the same-sex. Homophobia includes prejudice, discrimination, harassment, and acts of violence brought on by fear and hatred.

LGBTQ: An acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer.

Pansexual/Omnisexual: Someone who is emotional, physically, romantically, sexually, and spiritually attracted to all gender identities/expressions, including those outside the gender-conforming binary. Similar to bisexual, but different in that the concept deliberately rejects the gender binary. Polysexual people are attracted to “many” but not necessarily to all genders.

Queer: An umbrella term that many prefer both because of convenience (easier than gay, lesbian, etc.) and because it does not force the person who uses it to choose a more specific label for their gender identity or sexual orientation.

Queer theory: A field of the post-structuralist critical theory that emerged in the early 1990s out of the fields of queer studies and women's studies. Queer theory includes both queer readings of texts and the theorization of “queerness” itself. Queer theory “focuses on mismatches between sex, gender, and desire” (GLSEN, 2014, p. 2).

Sex: The classification of a person as male or female. At birth, infants are assigned a sex, usually based on the appearance of their external anatomy. (This is what is written on the birth certificate.) A person's sex, however, is a combination of bodily characteristics, including chromosomes, hormones, internal and external reproductive organs, and secondary sex characteristics (GLSEN, 2017).

Sexual orientation: Describes a person's enduring physical, romantic, and emotional attraction to another person. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same. Transgender people may be straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer. For example, a person who transitions from male to female and is attracted solely to men would typically identify as a straight woman (GLSEN, 2017).

Transgender: An umbrella term for people whose gender identities and gender expressions differ from what is typically associated with the sex that they were assigned at birth.

People under the transgender umbrella may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms, including transgender. Many transgender people are prescribed hormones by their doctors to bring their bodies into alignment with their gender identity. Some undergo surgery as well. However, not all transgender people can or will take those steps, and a transgender identity is not dependent upon physical appearance or medical procedures (GLSEN).

Trans*: Prefix or adjective used as an abbreviation of transgender, derived from the Greek word meaning “across from” or “on the other side of.” Many consider trans* to be an inclusive and useful umbrella term. Trans (without the asterisk) is most often applied to trans men and trans women, and the asterisk is used for a cross-dresser, bigender, gender fluid, gender**k, genderless, genderqueer, non-binary, non-gendered, third gender, trans man, trans woman, transgender, transsexual, and two-spirit individual.

Title IX: U.S law stating, “No person in the United States shall, by sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance” (US Department of Education, 1972).

In this research study, the term *transgender* refers to individuals who have identified that their natal sex (the sex they were assigned at birth) is different from their internal experience of gender and preferred gender expression. The term *gender nonconforming* or *gender creative* refers to individuals who do not follow other people’s ideas or stereotypes about how they should look, or act based on sex they were assigned at birth. “Gender identity” refers to how people see and identify themselves; for example, some people identify as female, as male, as a combination of genders, as a gender other than male or female, or as no gender. The working definitions for this study are based on the current academic literature. *Sex* is used to describe the

biological sex at the time a person is born, also referred to as natal sex. The terms *male*, *female*, and *intersex* will be used as terms describing the individual's sex. (i.e., natal sex). Gender refers to the psychological identity of being a man, woman, both, or neither within the mind of a person. The gender pronouns used in this study are his, her, or hir, and the participants were asked their preferred gender pronouns at the first meeting. Throughout the study, the sex or gender used to describe a person reflects their preferred pronoun.

General Procedures

Researcher positionality and reflexivity guided the design and procedures for this study. Purposive sampling was used to obtain participants. Participants were selected based on meeting specific characteristics they had to be transgender, transitioning, and gender non-conforming individuals ages of eighteen and older. I used snowball sampling to recruit additional transgender and gender nonconforming youth: study participants were invited to share information about the study with other youth who would be willing to consider participating, were given flyers to pass out to friends and acquaintances and encouraged to share information via Facebook. I was looking for a six or more participants, six participants would meet the recommended number of participants for photovoice as well as meeting the needs of a phenomenological study.

Once I had obtained six participants, I met with all participants, either in person or via skype. During this first meeting I explained the photovoice process, had them sign all consent and release forms. If the meeting was conducted via skype, the consent and release forms were emailed to the participants. It was important to collect all informed consent as well as consent to release the photographs during this meeting. I utilized several consent and release forms: participant's consent to be part of the study (Appendix D); individual's consent to be

photographed, for other individuals who appear in photographs (Appendix E); photographed individuals' consent to allow the photographs to be published (Appendix F); and participant/photographers consent to allow the images to be published (Appendix G). If the participants took pictures of minors, there was a consent form for parents/guardians (Appendix H). All consent forms were kept secure throughout the process.

Each participant was asked to provide the researcher with twenty-five photos. Each participant was given the option to use their mobile device/smart phone or a digital camera provided by the researcher. They were also provided a tutorial on how to use the digital camera if they choose to use it. Participants who borrowed a digital camera were provided with a SIM card for storage of the photos, and that card was returned to the researcher along with the camera. To those who preferred to use their smart phone/mobile devices, the researcher provided the email address dedicated for this project for image forwarding. Participants were also invited to share existing personal photos that told of their experiences in high school (e.g., yearbook photos, prom pictures, etc.). If they supplied the researcher with such a photo, copies were made, and the originals were returned. The advantages of using photographs are that participants may not be comfortable discussing their gender and sexual identity directly, and some experiences may be better expressed through photographs. Photographs are also a good way to break the ice between researchers and participants, making both more comfortable. After the researcher met with participants to explain their role in the study and answer any questions they had, I gave them a date to have digital photographs emailed to me. Once the researcher received all the digital photographs from participants, hard copies of each photograph from. Interview dates were scheduled with each participant. There was a series of three interviews with each participant.

After the photographs were emailed to the researcher from participants, they were put into PowerPoint format and an interview session was held with each participant. The photographs were used to prompt the interview responses. Participants were asked to sort, title and caption each of their photographs as well as explain the objects in the photographs, what they meant, their origins, and what elements may have been missing (Harper, 1986).

Data collection began with the first meeting and continued through the entire process. Since data collection takes place over several meetings, it is constantly changing and evolving. Every interview, presentation of individual photographs, and sharing of participants' experiences with their photographs produces additional data as well as the narratives that accompanied each photograph. The researcher audio recorded the interviews and numbered the photographs so that corresponding taped stories could be linked to each photograph. The researcher used an open-ended semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix H, I, and J) and labeled the photographs to begin the data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 69).

The first-round of interviews allowed for the participants' input with in-depth discussions of each photograph. The hope was that the participants would be able to explain what each photograph means to them instead of the researcher applying meanings to the photographs and labels for them. The photo elicitation that took place during this interview is a core method in photovoice. Photo elicitation "is based on the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview" (Harper, 2002, p. 13). In photo elicitation, photos are used to uncover memories, providing the "interviewer and the interviewee with more than one symbolic mean of expression, language, and image" (Latz, 2017, p. 75).

During the first interview, participants gave their photos a title and caption. It was my hope, through this discussion, that different layers of meaning would be unveiled about the way

the photos “reconstruct” the story of the participant’s high school experiences (Seidman, 2013). Participants selected the images they wanted to talk about in the interview. This allowed them to be in control of the interview and the discussion topics. The participants also choose the order in which we discussed the photographs, giving them the power to guide the interview process (Appendix H).

The in-depth interviews concentrated on the details of the participants’ lived experience. For this semi-structured interview, the researcher asked participants to talk about high school in general: their friends, their teachers, the classes they took, and any other important details that provide a more precise insight into the phenomenon. As Wagner (1979) stated, “photographs never tell us all we want to know but they can provide an excellent vehicle for asking important questions” (p. 289; Appendix I).

The third interviews were reflections on what the high school experience meant to the participants. We also revisited the photographs to see if the participants wanted to change the photographs that they wished to include in the stud and to discuss how these photographs reflected their high school experiences. This interview was meant to “address the intellectual and emotional connections” between the participants and their photographs (Seidman, 2013; Appendix J).

Each interview was approximately an hour to an hour-and-a-half long and was spaced from three days to a week apart, leaving time for the participants to think over the preceding interviews. Participants were assigned a pseudonym. The researcher is the only person who knows the participants’ pseudonyms, and all information has been locked up with a lock and key. It will not be shared with or given to anyone.

Interviews were recorded using a live scribe pen. The recorded interviews were sent to a transcriptionist. When the transcripts were returned, each participant was sent a copy of their interview to make sure they were accurate, and it gave participants an opportunity to add or delete information.

Upon completion of the direct transcription of each interview, the researcher identified emergent themes using in vivo, emotion, process, and descriptive coding. Once the first coding was completed for each interview, I utilized in vivo software to cross-reference each interview to identify common word repetitions that were then categorized into themes.

In vivo software by QSR is designed to help researchers organize, analyze, and find insights in unstructured, qualitative data like interviews, open-ended survey responses, articles, social media, and web content. Since the researcher was interested in the lived high school experiences of transgender and gender nonconforming youth and the meanings that they assigned to objects, people, places, and events in their reflective experiences, as expressed through their photographs, the I borrowed techniques from phenomenology to analyze the data from the interview sessions. I used interpretive phenomenological analysis, as described by Smith and Osborn (2008), to explore how participants made sense of their past personal and social high school experiences and the situations they faced by focusing on the meanings that various experiences, events, and situations held for them.

In the first stage of analysis, I read and reread the transcripts to become as familiar with the accounts, and each reading afforded an opportunity to find new information. I then reread the transcript and started searching for themes, recurrent patterns, layers of meaning, and interconnections. The analysis was concerned with trying to understand what participants' experiences in high school were like, from their points of view.

Wang and Burris (1997) described a three-stage approach to data analysis: selecting, contextualizing, and codifying. The participants selected the photographs that told of their high school experiences; the participant's selection of photographs created the material needed for contextualizing these experiences. Contextualizing occurred in various ways: through caption writing and storytelling, issues, themes, or theories emerged from the interviews. Tinkler (2013) proposed the following procedure for analyzing a photo interview:

- What do the participants see?
- How do the photos express the lived experiences of the participants?
- What is said and what is not said?
- How does the discussion compare with the photographs?
- How do the participants interact with the photographs? (pp. 193–194)

The photos themselves were analyzed in a separate stage of data analysis. Each photo was analyzed as well as the combined collection of photos to see if common themes and recurrent patterns, meaning, and interconnections emerged from them. Saldaña suggested that “the best approach to analyzing visual data is a holistic, interpretive lens guided by intuitive inquiry and strategic questions” (p. 52). Analytic memo writing and bracketing was used at the beginning of the coding process “to document and reflect on the coding processes, coding choices, patterns, categories, subcategories, themes, and concepts” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 41).

To get to the essence of the “lived experiences” of the participants, Saldaña recommends that researchers listen repeatedly to the audio recording of each interview, becoming familiar with the words of the interviewees in order to develop a holistic sense of their lived experiences. In the descriptive coding analysis process, Saldaña recommends that the researcher first chronologically bracket the commentary and begin a reduction of the information. The data

reduction process begins with open coding and interpretive memoing wherein the researcher identifies the words that best represent emerging topics that might serve to form categories of meaning. Next, the researcher identifies the salient points that developed within the data to shape the evolution of core topics. The final stage requires the researcher to think deeply about the evolving categories and search for alternative understanding before converting the emergent categories into thematic units. Creswell (2007) suggested that researchers search for patterns by “pulling the data apart and putting them back together in more meaningful ways” (p. 163). Through this process, my hope was to discover how transgender and gender nonconforming students experience high school.

Researcher Positionality

I am a high school social studies teacher who has been in the classroom for thirty-one years. In that time, I have seen many changes in the history curriculum. I have seen a change from a Euro-centric global history to a more Afro/Asian global history. I have seen the inclusion of Latin American and women’s history in the U.S history curriculum and, most recently, the inclusion of the Stonewall riots.

Building upon these changes, administration, teachers, and staff can create a safe environment for transgender and gender nonconforming students. Creating a safe school environment for transgender and gender nonconforming students will enable other students to explore their gender identities and will send a positive message of acceptance for all marginalized groups. All students should be treated equally, and schools should be safe places for every student, regardless of race, gender, color or religion. Teachers and staff need to be aware of and sensitive to student needs, they need to avoid assumptions based on gender expression, they need to be able to communicate with all students in a respectful way, and they

need to create a safe space for students to express who they are. Teachers and staff also need to be made aware of accurate and current terminology for addressing transitioning, transgender, and gender non-conforming students. School districts, in turn, need to provide teachers and staff with training and establish a protocol for addressing discrimination, making teachers aware of the political and legal considerations surrounding transgender youth so that they can teach all students regardless of their personal biases. We all have a biased view of the world because we all have a single, limited perspective. We only see what is before us. We only hear what is around us. We only read what is in front of us. Where we are from and how we were raised inform our view of race, class, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and culture. This view influences how we view, respond to, treat, and react to the people and experiences in our lives. Professionals who deal with children on a regular basis need to put their biases aside to meet the health, safety, and psychological, as well as the educational, needs of their students.

Research on adolescents has found that self-identification as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender is happening at increasingly earlier ages (Troiden, 1998). It is more likely today than in the past that students will enter college having already begun, or having completed, the coming-out process. As more high school students come out, there will be a demand for professional development for faculty, staff, and administrators so that they can meet the needs of transitioning, transgender, and gender non-conforming students. For many teachers, having a transgender or gender non-conforming student is a new experience, and they need to be trained on how to be sensitive to the needs of those students. To create diverse and responsive classrooms, teachers need to “practice using the terms gay, lesbian, transsexual, bisexual, transgender and use them naturally in context to reduce the stigma associated with the words” (Daniel, 2007). I do not hold any negative biases toward transgender or gender non-conforming

individuals and I have worked with many LGBTQ students, whom I have taught over the thirty-one years of my teaching career. I consider myself an ally and my classroom an LGBTQ “safe spot.”

Limitations of the Study

In this study, I relied on young adults telling me their stories of school and classroom experiences. Relying on the perceptions of young adults was a limitation of this study. Relying on a relatively small number of participants was another limitation. Having only female to male transgender individuals may be a limitation.

Delimitations of the Study

The delimitation of this study was that participants were chosen from across the United States. This gave the researcher an opportunity to see and hear about the lived experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming youth without the participant sample being bound to a particular school or community. As more adolescents and children “come out” about being transgender or gender nonconforming, it becomes more important for teachers, staff, school administrators, and communities to realize that every child deserves to be their true self and have their individual needs met. This study describes the reflective high school experiences of transgender nonconforming young adults using photovoice.

Current research at the university level has described steps for creating more accepting campus environments (Beemyn, 2003; Beemyn, B., Curtis, B., Davis, M., & Tubbs, N. J., 2005). As colleges and universities try to create inclusive environments for transgender and gender non-conforming students, they need to be aware that “there are currently only 229 campuses that have a dedicated office or resource center for LGBTQ students, with full-time or part-time paid staff members” (Windmeyer, 2017). Colleges and universities also need to address LGBTQ inclusive

non-discrimination clauses. In 2017 only “26 percent of campuses nationally prohibit discrimination based on ‘sexual orientation’ and less than 16 percent include ‘gender identity and expression’” (Windmeyer, 2017,). Secondary schools also need to meet the needs of a growing transgender and gender non-conforming student body. Secondary schools, however, face unique structural, political, and logical barriers to addressing these issues. Secondary schools need to consider the complexity of queer identity and the confines of secondary learning environments that are still influenced by dominant, gender binary ideas. Secondary schools also need to address issues related to basic student needs, policy, and facilities that impact transgender and gender nonconforming youth. The intent behind conducting this study was to provide details about the experiences of transgender students and gender nonconforming young adults through photographs and interviews.

Summary

As an increasing number of high school students identify openly as transgender and gender non-conforming, they navigate violence, discrimination, and harassment from peers and others. Existing studies on trans issues in education have positioned transgender and gender nonconforming students within the larger grouping of LGBTQ individuals. This study (a) clarifies and documents the needs and reflective experiences of transgender and gender nonconforming youth; (b) determines the extent to which schools and federal, state, local, and school policies are meeting those needs; and (c) utilizes input from participants in support of school, community, and policy changes. I employed the qualitative research methodology of photovoice and aspects of phenomenology, which allowed participants to tell their high school stories through photography and personal reflective experiences. The photos and interviews were used to suggest changes to existing policies and practices as well as to draw attention to

transgender and gender non-conforming student experiences. The frameworks for this study were Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Freire's Empowerment Education Theory, and Queer Theory. These theories were used to explain, predict, and understand the phenomena to extend existing knowledge of the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming high school students. By highlighting the lived experiences and issues facing our transgender and gender non-conforming youth, my hope was to highlight the need for change in how our schools address these students' needs. The results of this study may also contribute to a better understanding of all marginalized students.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

It is commonly accepted that teachers, support staff, and school leaders must create schools in which all students feel that they are safe and can be successful; this is even more important for marginalized students. Marginalized students are the population of students placed in a position of being powerless, unimportant in influence, or powerless in society. Marginalized students can be classified as students living in poverty, English Language Learners, students with disabilities, African American Students, and LGBTQ students. Transgender, transsexual, and gender non-conforming students are a marginalized group that falls under the larger LGBTQ umbrella, and they face issues of fear, uncertainty, hatred, violence, and discrimination. Many marginalized students find it difficult to be successful if they feel they are not safe or that they are not accepted by their teachers or peers, and these issues can compromise their academic achievement as well as their social and emotional health.

The prevalence of transphobic bullying impedes the feeling of safety for transgender and gender nonconforming youth, which impacts their high school experience. In school, many LGBTQ students struggle with being harassed and bullied, but the struggle is even greater for transgender and gender nonconforming students. In 2015, GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network) published the National School Climate Survey (GLSEN, 2015). The survey highlighted the experience of school-aged LGBTQ students, the challenges that LGBTQ students face at school, and the resources that schools use that support LGBTQ students' well-being. The survey also indicates that teacher and school administrative support creates a safer, more gender

inclusive education climate. LGBT-inclusive curricula, anti-bullying policies, and inclusive, accepting student organizations like GSA (Gay-Straight Alliances) are also important to supporting a gender inclusive school climate. As Human Rights Watch (Bochenek 1999; Leung 2008; Wyss, 2004) stated, “if gay and lesbian people have achieved some modicum of acceptance in the United States over the past several decades, transgender people remain misunderstood at best and vilified at worst” (p. 60). While transgender and gender nonconforming scholarship are beginning to appear more frequently in education journal articles, it is usually included within the LGBTQ (lesbian gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) category.

Often, in other words, even when transgender people are included in research studies, the data are not disaggregated; therefore, the relevance of the results and conclusions for transgender people, in particular, cannot be determined (Irwin, 2002). Over the past fifteen years, meanwhile, many books have begun to focus on transgender issues (e.g., Beemyn, 2005; Bopp, & Charters, 2005; Carter, 2000; Lees, 1998; Nakamura, 1998; Sears, 2005). Until the publication of *The Transgender Child* by Stephanie Brill and Rachel Pepper (2008), the literature tended to focus on the health and wellbeing of transgender individuals and experiences of transgender college students or adults. Very little attention has been paid to younger transgender people. The gaps in the literature are that transgender issues, particularly the experiences of transgender and gender nonconforming high school students, are missing from examinations of school curricula and from the field of teacher education more broadly.

Brief History of the Transgender Movement

There is historical evidence of homosexual activity and same-sex love in every documented culture throughout history. However, there were few formal studies of homosexuality and gender until Sigmund Freud and Magnus Hirschfeld investigated the area of

human sexual behavior. Freud and Hirschfeld acknowledged the concept of homosexual and bisexual orientation, writing that it was a natural occurrence. According to Hirschfeld, “homosexuality was part of the plan of nature and creation just like normal love” (Domeier, 2015, p. 128).

Before Jazz Jennings and Caitlin Jenner, the social, political, and economic history of transgender and gender nonconforming individuals took a backseat to such histories of other marginalized groups. Transgender individuals have faced exclusion, jail, discrimination, and violence for centuries. The twentieth century brought about numerous social and political changes for many of the countries’ marginalized groups. Many of these changes would start in the 1920s with the passing of the 19th Amendment granting women the right to vote. With this amendment, a one hundred-year-old fight for equal voting rights for women had finally ended, but the movement for social and political equality for other marginalized groups would continue. Puritanical ideas about sex, the importance of family values, and sexual morality gave way to new laws that placed individuals who were considered immoral in jail. The struggle for human rights, social justice, civil rights, and voting rights for marginalized groups defined the cultural politics of the post-World War II era in the United States.

During World War II, America’s brave men and women, both gay and straight, were abroad fighting hatred and bigotry in Europe. When they came home, they returned to a United States afraid of communism. As Senator Joseph McCarthy was arresting and prosecuting communists, citizens, journalists, and politicians, there was also a growing belief that homosexuals were a threat to the United States. In 1952, President Eisenhower issued an Executive Order “making homosexuality grounds for dismissal from federal employment” (Eaklor, 2008, p. 87). During this period, it was believed that homosexuals and communists

posed a security risk to the United States since homosexuality was considered a “perversion and homosexuals were characterized as mentally and morally unstable” (Eaklor, 2008, p. 88). Also, in the 1950s, the Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, and Transgender (LBGT) community increased in visibility in the U.S. through activism. The Mattachine Society, formed by Harry Hay in 1950, was the first recognized gay rights organization, and its proponents worked for gay equality and visibility in American society. The Mattachines published literature, distributed flyers, and tried to combat inequalities (D’Emillio, 1993). In 1955, the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) formed as a social club to provide lesbian women with a place to work together and socialize without inhibition (Scott, 2006). Despite these early efforts, the cultural progress of the gay community remained minimal. As historian John D’Emillio has argued, the political and social conditions in the United States that encouraged the spying, entrapment, and home invasions of homosexuals by police, the Post Office, the Federal Bureau of Investigation held back the gay rights movement.

Ten years later, the Civil Rights Act of 1965 outlawed racial and voting discrimination in the United States and helped to bring about the gay and lesbian rights movement. The turning point in the gay rights movement came in 1969 when police officers in New York City raided a popular gay bar, The Stonewall Inn. Weeks of violence and rioting followed. Instead of being passive advocates, lesbians and gays increased their visibility through protests and marches. (Eaklor, 2008, p. 8). Historian David Carter, analyzing the historical impact of the riots in *Stonewall: The Riots that Sparked the Gay Revolution*, identified the timing, social history, cultural change, local history, and geography of the Stonewall raid as characteristics that separated it from previous gay raids and disturbances. The bars location in Greenwich Village allowed many homosexuals to gather quickly and control the streets. Stonewall pushed

homosexuality onto the front pages of newspapers and into the American conversation. It also provided a symbol of gay rights. The social and political gains that immediately followed Stonewall made it an important moment for Americans, both gay and straight.

The fight for social and political rights for marginalized individuals has been a continuous effort. As various groups gain rights, other marginalized groups continue to fight for theirs. In this process, the history of the transgender movement has been combined with that of the broader Lesbian and Gay movement. The political and social needs of transgender, transitioning, and gender nonconforming individuals are important today, at a time when the number of students living openly as their authentic selves is increasing. According to a GLSEN study, “5% of American high school students identify as gay or lesbian; 16% said they have a homosexual relative; and 72% said they know someone who is homosexual. This suggests that, on average, every classroom in America has at least one student who identifies as lesbian or gay and that a majority of those students know at least one gay or lesbian person, whether it be a teacher, a classmate or a family member” (GLSEN, 2015).

Transgender students face the fear of violence, social rejection, discrimination, harassment, and bullying. These threats place trans youth at risk developmentally, emotionally, socially, and physically (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006). Transitioning and transgender youth are at high risk of facing discrimination and psychological maladjustment during their high school years (Cohen-Kettenis & Gooren, 1999; Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006).

Factors Impacting Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students

School Policy

The United States Constitution provides for the protection of individual rights. While the First Amendment to the Constitution provides for freedom of expression (“Congress shall make

no law abridging the freedom of speech”), the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment (1868) states that the federal government and state governments will not deny any person within its jurisdiction “the equal protection of the laws” (U.S. Constitution, 1868). The Equal Protection Clause should protect transgender and gender nonconforming students, but after the 2016 election, President Trump issued a letter to schools advising them that state and local school districts could interpret anti-discrimination laws. “This is an issue best solved at the state and local level,” Education Secretary Betsy DeVos said. “Schools, communities, and families can find—and in many cases have found—solutions that protect all students” (US Dept. of Education, 2017). In February of 2017, President Trump “ended federal protection for transgender students that allowed them to use public school bathrooms and locker rooms matching their gender identities” (Gurman, 2017).

Educators, however, need to remember that students do not shed their constitutional rights at the schoolhouse gate. As Title IX of the federal *Education Amendments Act* of 1972 states,

No person in the United States shall, by sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.

Title IX was established in 1972 to protect the rights of all students, including transgender and gender-nonconforming students, from sex discrimination. Under Title IX, once a student notifies the school that they will begin transitioning, the school must begin treating the student in ways that are consistent with the student’s gender identity. When a school provides sex-segregated activities or facilities, transgender students must be allowed to participate in such activities and access such facilities in a manner consistent with their gender identity. Moreover, schools should

be aware of their obligation under Title IX and the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act* (FERPA) to protect the privacy of their students when maintaining education records (1974, 2012).

Many court cases dating back to 1989 have supported Title VII of the *Civil Rights Act* of 1964 in LGBTQ cases. Title VII was intended

to enforce the constitutional right to vote, to confer jurisdiction upon the district courts of the United States to provide injunctive relief against discrimination in public accommodations, to authorize the Attorney General to institute suits to protect constitutional rights in public facilities and public education, to extend the Commission on Civil Rights, to prevent discrimination in federally assisted programs, to establish a Commission on Equal Employment Opportunity, and for other purposes.

Nevertheless, discrimination and violence are evident in classrooms, hallways, and communities of our nation's schools. "No Promo Homo Laws," for instance, "are local or state education laws that expressly forbid teachers from discussing gay and transgender issues (including sexual health and HIV/AIDS awareness) in a positive light if at all. Some laws even require that teachers actively portray LGBT people in a negative or inaccurate way" (GLSEN, 2015). These laws create environments in which LGBTQ students feel unsafe and excluded. Student equity, in other words, remains a fundamental challenge facing teachers and educational leaders. Equity implies that schools and teachers are giving as much advantage, consideration, or latitude to one student as is given to another student. Students who do not feel safe will face challenges academically and with attendance, may not have access to challenging coursework, may not be engaged in the school and community, may not participate in extracurricular activities, may have behavior problems, and may even commit suicide (Barton, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 1994,

1995, 2005; Irvine, 1990; Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2007; Kozol, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Mayer, Mullens, & Moore, 2000; National Center for Education Statistics, 2007; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Wenglinsky, 2000).

Schools in Transition: A Guide to Supporting Transgender Students in K12 Schools provides schools with information on how to navigate the issues surrounding transgender students in K-12 schools. Produced in partnership with the National Center for Lesbian Rights, Gender Spectrum, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the National Education Association, this resource provides schools with guidance to help them provide a safe, supportive, and inclusive school environment for transgender youth. As The Human Rights Campaign (2015) states, “parents . . . shouldn't have to rely on luck or happenstance to assure that their transgender children are learning in safe, affirming and inclusive schools” (p. 1-42). Schools need to meet all students’ needs, and the “parents of transgender youth shouldn't have to fight or expect a fight when they advocate that their children are treated with respect and kept safe while at school.” (Orr, et al. 2015).

Schools in Transition was written for faculty, staff, administrators, parents, and other adults who work with transgender and gender nonconforming youth. The book lays out general guidelines for meeting the needs of transgender students, including the legal issues related to keeping the student's information private as well as the importance of the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act* (FERPA). Other topics covered include the basic concepts of gender, the difference between gender and sex, and the importance of affirming gender identity. Schools need to do more than implement nondiscrimination policies, its authors argue: They need to change behavior. Suspensions and expulsions, for instance, are meant to protect all students, but they are used disproportionately against LGBTQ students, students of color, and students with

disabilities (Himmelstein & Brückner, 2011). Teachers, administrators, and staff need to be aware of appropriate pronouns and gender identification when working with transgender and gender nonconforming youth. Names and pronouns identify who a person is and how they speak and interact with those around them. As Orr (2016) noted, “In our everyday lives, we consistently make an effort to use a person’s chosen name and pronoun without even asking whether that is the person’s legal name or gender, let alone requiring proof. It is important to extend those same social courtesies to a transgender student” (p. 1-42).

Curriculum and Pedagogy

Schools today are charged with teaching children from a variety of cultural, ethnic, and family backgrounds; for many students, a traditional nuclear family is no longer the norm (Johnson & O’Connor, 2002). The change in family dynamics has created a need for school districts to create an inclusive education that promotes diversity (Casper & Schultz, 1999; Casper, Schultz, & Wickens, 1992; Ryan & Martin, 2000). According to Stainback and Stainback (1990), “an inclusive school is a place where everyone belongs, is accepted, supported, and is supported by his or her peers and other members of the school community in the course of having his or her educational needs met” (p. 3).

According to Ray and Gregory (2001), the parents of LGBT students are concerned primarily with safety and comfort issues; their second concern is a lack of an inclusive curriculum for their children. About one third of the parents who participated in their study believed that there was an omission of LGBT issues in the curricula. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (2015), “gender identity is established by age 4, though children’s awareness and understanding of being transgender may emerge at any time during the K–12 years” (Kahn, 2016, p. 70-73). However, transgender and gender nonconforming identities are

virtually nonexistent in the curricula at the elementary and secondary level and in teacher preparation programs. (Gorski, Davis & Reiter, 2013; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014).

By law, schools are supposed to be safe and inclusive places for students, but they can subject students to both subtle and directly hostile lessons about how people act out their roles in society and who they should be. School curricula need to be developed to be inclusive of all races, religions, and genders. For educators, though, inclusive curriculum development can be risky. Teachers may have unsupportive administrators or Boards of Education that resist a gender inclusive curriculum even though research has shown that LGBTQ students in schools that have inclusive curricula hear fewer homophobic and transphobic comments and feel more accepted by their classmates (Kosciw et al., 2014). Even though there is more visibility of LGBTQ issues in the media and politics, the “absolute invisibility and silencing of lesbian and gay issues” (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2001, p. 128) in many primary school curricula remains, and transgender issues are even more invisible (Rands, 2009). In many curricula, the assumption persists that all students fit into a specific gender: either boy or girl. This is most evident when teachers address their classes as “boys and girls,” or “ladies and gentlemen,” in the common practice of having “boy” and “girl” bathrooms and locker rooms, and in the segregation of students into “boy” and “girl” groups or lines (Brill & Pepper, 2008). Educators also need to be aware of proper pronoun use with transgender, gender non-binary, and gender nonconforming students and to work against imposing cis-normativity.

Sonia Nieto (1992), in her book *Affirming Diversity*, defines multicultural education as a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students. It challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society

and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender, among others) that students, their communities, and teachers reflect.

Multicultural education permeates the schools' curriculum and instructional strategies, as well as the interactions among teachers, students, and families, and the very way that schools conceptualize the nature of teaching and learning. Because it uses critical pedagogy as its underlying philosophy and focuses on knowledge, reflection, and action (praxis) as the basis for social change, multicultural education promotes democratic principles of social justice. (p. 208)

Multicultural curriculum and literature represent the diversity that exists in our schools and society. Research on multicultural education practices has found that multicultural

do indeed improve the educational outcomes of students of color. Multicultural educational practices such as integrating content from diverse people, deconstructing status hierarchies between students, and creating more empowering school cultures through a reconceptualization of who can achieve high levels of learning all serve to increase the learning, achievement, and engagement of students (Zirkel, 2008, p.1147-1181)

To accomplish these results, teachers need to develop an awareness of student dynamics and interactions and learn proper responses to them so that they can model such responses for their students.

Gloria Ladson Billings, in her 1995 article "Theory into Practice," underscored the need for a "culturally relevant pedagogy." Today, the need for culturally relevant pedagogy and gender inclusive curricula are more important than ever. Culturally relevant pedagogy supports the "ability to develop students academically," requires "a willingness to nurture and support

cultural competence,” and encourages the “development of a sociopolitical consciousness” (p. 483). While Gloria Ladson-Billings work is based on Black feminist theory, a culturally relevant pedagogy provides a framework for teachers to show cultural competence and skills when teaching in any cross-cultural or multicultural setting. Teachers employing culturally relevant pedagogy enables students to see themselves in or relate to the course content and course literature.

In 2016, California became the first state in the nation to include culturally relevant LGBT facts and figures in its public-school curriculum. As Rick Zbur, Executive Director of Equality California, stated, “By seeing themselves reflected in lessons and materials, students’ experiences are validated, and their sense of self-worth reinforced, creating the opportunity for students to be able to achieve academically” (California Senate Bill 48). In November of 2017, California became the first state in the nation to use social studies textbooks that included information about the LGBT community. As schools and district try to make curriculum inclusive of transgender and gender nonconforming students, however, they are being met with push back from parents, religious organizations, and the community. Washington State, North Carolina, and Virginia are a few of the states facing such difficulties as they try to make changes to their curricula.

Inclusive curricular changes are important because if a teacher has a direct or implicit bias against transgender and gender nonconforming students, it can change the teacher’s expectations and treatment of those students and impact the academic achievement as well as the social and emotional health of students in that group. In the words of Rosenthal and Babad (1985), “When we expect certain behaviors of others, we are likely to act in ways that make the expected behavior more likely to occur” (p. 36-39). Teachers need to be taught how to overcome

their direct biases and how to become aware of their implicit biases. Implicit bias occurs when stereotypes or attitudes influence our understanding and acceptance of people in an unconscious manner. In schools, students may notice implicit bias in the classroom from peers as well as from staff, teachers, and administrators. Broockman and Kalla (2016) suggested that alleviating bias against transgender individuals is as simple as engaging with transgender and gender nonconforming individuals. In their study, canvassers met with voters who held anti-transgender viewpoints by knocking at their doors and engaging in brief conversations. The study showed that a short conversation actively taking the perspective of others can markedly reduce prejudice for at least three months. They found that these conversations substantially reduced transphobia, with decreases in transphobia that were greater than America's average decrease in homophobia from 1998 to 2012. The gender identity of the messenger did not change these results. In a study dealing with implicit bias Morewedge (2015) used training videos on biases followed by a video game designed to "elicit and mitigate" biases, a tactic that was found to be largely effective in reducing implicit bias.

To help educators become more aware of educational and theoretical perspectives surrounding transgender and gender nonconforming youth, the book *Supporting Transgender and Gender Creative Youth* was written, providing a combination of research, theory, and proposed social action related to issues surrounding transgender and gender creative youth. The book has three sections—dealing with clinical, educational, and theoretical perspectives—to address the challenges that transgender and gender nonconforming youth faced. It contains an overview of research and practice for practitioners working with transgender and gender nonconforming youth and discusses the need to support gender diversity in schools as well as the need for gender inclusive language and curriculum.

School Safety for Transgender and Gender non-conforming Students

For many transgender and gender nonconforming students, going to school is an exercise in survival. In school, they face harassment, abuse, and physical attacks. Human Rights Watch conducted a study that involved interviewing 140 LGBTQ youths between the ages of twelve and twenty-one and one hundred thirty adults—including teachers, administrators, and other school staff—in seven states. The report highlights the failure of federal, state, and local governments to protect LGBTQ students' human rights and provided several recommendations for the implementation of nondiscrimination policies, the training of school staff, and the monitoring of school districts for compliance.

In the last decade, although transgender and gender nonconforming youth have become increasingly visible in high schools and on college campuses, they are one of the most underserved population in K–12 schools and on college campuses. Transgender and gender nonconforming youth do not receive the same resources as their heterosexual peers. They have been largely ignored in the academic literature. To provide a look into the experiences of transgender and gender nonconforming youth, *Serving the Needs of Transgender College Students* (Beemyn, 2002) provides a brief history of transgenderism before discussing the handful of published narratives by transgender youth. It concludes with recommendations for educators who are seeking to improve the campus climate for people of all genders. The article suggests that campuses should provide training for staff to raise awareness of the experiences of transgender and gender nonconforming college students. The article also includes a discussion of the skills necessary to becoming a good ally and provides a list of concrete actions to improve the

workplace environment for people of all genders. Beemyn also discussed the need for trans inclusive policy and procedural changes to address transphobic bullying on campus.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students continue to report a much higher incidence of violence, bullying, and harassment in schools than their heterosexual peers (Kosciw et al., 2010). LGBTQ students also report feelings of isolation and a lack of role models in schools. “Bullying of LGBTQ Youth and School Climate for LGBTQ Educators” provides a discussion of the results of a 2011 study in which teachers who self-identified as LGBT completed a survey to provide information on workplace climate. The results of that study demonstrated that LGBT educators work under the old “don’t ask don’t tell” school climate, perpetuating the vicious cycle of hiding from their identities for fear of losing their jobs. The study suggested that if school leaders created safe and accepting school climates for LGBT educators, there would be a decrease in violence, bullying, and homophobic behavior, especially of LGBT students.

Johnson and Singh (2014) explored the lived experiences of transgender, queer, and questioning youth in the process of trying to make meaning of their sexual orientation and gender identity through their high school experiences. The authors provided a discussion of the hostile school environment that LGBTQ students navigate daily and how school personnel rarely intervene. The researchers also discussed the “lack of progress” in schools in combating homophobia and heterosexism as well as the need for training for school personnel and highlighted the need for more research on the experiences of transgender and gender nonconforming youth. Most “scholarship in counseling and education literature regarding transgender and gender nonconforming youth,” they found, “is largely conceptual and focuses on

developing strategies to improve school climate for this population” (Johnson & Singh, 2011, p.419-434; see also Chen-Hayes, 2001; Gonzalez & McNulty, 2011; Singh & Burns, 2009).

Johnson and Singh (2011) found several themes in their data, including a need for resilience, the need for students to feel safe, and the actions teachers can take to help them feel safe at school. The young people who participated in this study revealed that “the school setting was a complex experience to navigate, they do not want others to minimize their expressions or experiences as “trends” or “fads” or less valuable” (Johnson, 2014, p. 419-434). Gender identity, for many transgender and gender nonconforming youth, is fluid and depends on the setting and circumstances in which these youth are situated. Transgender and gender nonconforming youth feel they are excluded, “not only from the straight community but also from gay and lesbian communities who were not understanding or accepting of gender nonconforming identities and expressions” (Johnson, 2014, p. 419-434). All students need to feel safe in school, and they need to trust that the adults around them will provide for their safety. “It would be cool if the staff knew how to protect me and there is a need for it, for sure!” (Johnson, 2014, p. 419-434).

A study entitled *Harsh Realities* used data from GLSEN’s fifth National School Climate Survey, which was conducted during the 2006–2007 school year. To obtain a representative sample, participants were chosen from community-based groups serving LGBT youth and the social media website My Space. To examine the differences between transgender and non-transgender students, a sample of 6,209 LGBT students were used, but the report examined the specific experiences of 295 transgender students between the ages of thirteen and twenty. The majority of the sample was White (64%) and identified as gay or lesbian (54%). It was found that most of these transgender youths attend schools that had hostile school climates and frequently heard homophobic language and negative remarks about their gender expressions.

Many of the students felt unsafe in school and had experienced in-school victimization. The report stated that

a hostile school climate can have very negative repercussions on transgender students' ability to succeed in school—a high incidence of harassment was related to increased absenteeism, decreased educational aspirations, and lower academic performance.

Transgender students fared worse on these educational outcomes than non-transgender lesbian, gay, and bisexual students. (Greytak, et al., 2009, p. 1-48).

The conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that educators, policymakers, and safe school advocates must try to understand the specific experiences of transgender students and implement measures to ensure that schools are safe and inclusive environments for transgender and gender nonconforming youth.

Get That Freak: Homophobia and Transphobia in High School is a Canadian study of sixteen young adults who shared their experiences with bullying during high school (Haskell, 2010). The sixteen individuals shared their experiences with bullying in British Columbia high schools. These queer individuals agreed to participate in this study to share their experiences to “increase the visibility of queer youth in schools and to raise awareness of bullying (Haskell, 2010, p. 12). Haskell discussed the harm caused by homophobic and transphobic bullying. This study dealt with LGBT youth in general and not specifically transgender and gender nonconforming youth and made recommendations for battling homophobic and transphobic bullying.

Social Policy Report Safe Schools Policy for LGBTQ Students, a 2010 GLSEN report, provided a review of research on LGBTQ youth and schools, offering a context for understanding the rationale for related laws and policies. The report suggested that LGBTQ

youth are coming out at younger ages and that these younger ages of coming out appear to "conflict with emerging evidence about young adolescents' attitudes regarding homosexuality. We then review what is known about hostile school climates for LGBTQ youth and the implications for their social, emotional, and academic adjustment" (Russel, Kosciw, Horn, & Saewyc, 2010, p. 1-25). Research in this area has focused specifically on victimization and its impacts on transgender and gender nonconforming students. More recently, attention has shifted to the school-level factors (i.e., the structural conditions and education practices) that shape the experiences of LGBTQ students. The research on school policies and programs designed to create supportive environments for LGBTQ students reflects the overwhelming statistics (Russel et al., 2010): The "lack of policies and practices that affirm and support LGBT youth and a failure to implement protections that do exist means that LGBT students nationwide continue to face bullying, exclusion, and discrimination in school, putting them at physical and psychological risk and limiting their education" (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

Uneven protection of LGBT students exists in many states and school districts across the country and the protections that do exist are inadequate. "As transgender and gender nonconforming students have become more visible, many states and school districts have ignored their needs and failed to ensure they enjoy the same academic and extracurricular benefits as their non-transgender peers" (Human Rights Watch, 2016). States like Alabama, Arizona, Utah, and Louisiana have laws that restrict teachers from talking about LGBT issues at school. These laws "undermine a number of fundamental human rights, including LGBT students' rights to education, personal security, freedom from discrimination, access to information, free expression, association and privacy" (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

Human Rights Watch (2016) conducted 500 interviews with students, teachers, administrators, and parents in Alabama, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Texas, and Utah. Their report focused on the issues faced by LGBT students in U.S. schools. The major areas of concern included bullying, harassment, exclusion from school curricula and resources, restrictions on LGBT student groups, and other forms of discrimination and bigotry against students and staff based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

The collection *Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Issues in Education: Program, Policies, and Practices* (Sears, 2011) contains articles and essays from countries around the world on policies, programs, and practices surrounding LGBTQ students. It provides resources for parents and educators on topics such as bullying, transgender students, gay, straight alliances, race, and HIV education. In the collection, Imber (2011) discussed how teachers have ignored gender harassment and explored the need for schools to address the issues of sex and gender, stating, “school has a huge impact on the response we get from students when discussing sexuality and homophobia. An open and accepting environment allows students to work through homophobia, break down any stereotypes or issues they have” (p.9-13).

The American Educational Research Association (2015) has examined LGBTQ issues in education in a report providing extensive literature that deals with issues revolving around LGBTQ issues. Much of the literature has overlapping themes of bullying, harassment, and violence. Mention is made of the need for teacher training to help navigate gender-inclusive language. There is little to no mention, however, of how to develop a gender inclusive curriculum and the backlash that this effort may create. Most importantly, the literature is missing high school student voices, what these students’ experiences with teachers have been, and what needs to change in the classroom and schools across the country.

When we address the needs of LGBTQ students, we are also addressing the needs of all marginalized students. As federal mandates seek to improve student academic achievement, there seems to be a widening in the achievement gap between White students and their marginalized peers of color, but educators tend to forget other marginalized student groups. It is difficult for students to be successful if they do not feel safe or accepted (Simone, 2012). The continuous widening of the achievement gap suggests that the solution to the achievement gap problem may not lie in policies or practices. It may rest in the roles that teachers and schools play in the lives of their students.

Deficit Thinking

Deficit thinking in education is the practice of holding lower expectations for students with demographics that do not fit the traditional context of the school system (i.e., African American students, ELL students, LGBT, and Special Education students). Deficit thinking results in academic failure to address cultural, linguistic, moral, intellectual, and social pathologies among minority and lower income communities (Gorski, 2008; Nieto & Bode, 2012). It encompasses the notion that there is little that a school can do to "fix" marginalized students, so it reverts to providing them with interventions that help them to fit into the context of the dominant school culture. This literature, however, indicates that trying to "fix" students only further separates them from the rest of the school population, while it perpetuates biased attitudes and practices toward students who are marginalized.

Principals and other school leaders can help their staff to recognize the harmful effects of deficit thinking on students who are marginalized. Valencia's (1997) multiple-case study looked at the practices and challenges of two secondary school leaders in trying to eliminate deficit thinking practices among their staff and replace these with notions of democratic educational

thinking. In the anonymous surveys, middle school teachers blamed the student and the lack of parental involvement for students not doing well in school. Such examples of deficit thinking exist in schools because teachers have allowed it to fester in the halls and classroom for decades: Educational leaders need to work to change such negative biases. Valencia found that educators have assumed that the failure of minority students can be naturally attributed to the students' racial or cultural inferiority, language, low socioeconomic status, parents' low education, and students' perceived lack of interest. Some of the suggestions that came out of the study included opening the line of communication between staff and students, allowing all groups to have a voice. School leaders need to build the idea of community both inside the four walls of the school as well as in the community itself. If there is a sense of community, all stakeholders—including parents, teachers, and students—will work together to create a community based on respect and understanding (Deal, 1999).

Historically, research on deficit thinking has concentrated on minority students (students living in poverty or those with racial, ethnic, and cultural differences). Keefer (2017) explored the presence of deficit thinking among social studies teachers in Florida in a case study that focused on participants' understandings of the connection between social class and academic achievement, mobility, race, and ethnicity. The findings suggested that social studies teachers exhibit deficit thinking towards students living in poverty. Keefer's results suggested that "in order for social studies teachers to develop knowledge of students living in poverty, they must receive explicit training that challenges deficit thinking and stereotypes that lead to lowered expectations of students living in poverty" (Keefer, 2017, p. 50-75). Teacher training that challenges heteronormative thinking may help teachers who have transgender and gender non-conforming students.

Inclusive Education Practices for Marginalized Populations

Educators, Bias, and Inclusive Curriculum

Experts believe that for a curriculum to be inclusive, it must reflect all members of society (Jeltova & Fish, 2005). Unfortunately, schools do not always take the lead when it comes to addressing issues that are outside social norms since schools tend to respond to the political influences of the group in power (Kozik-Rosabal, 2000). Decisions regarding curricula are often based on the assumption that everyone is heterosexual (Macgillivray, 2000; Schneider & Owens, 2000). Thus, “Having a better understanding of what it means to be transgender or gender nonconforming is essential to implementing change. This begins with using language related to the transgender community in a respectful and accurate way that helps students trust you and feel safe” (Kahn, 2016, p. 70-73). Young people today are challenging the gender assumption that a person must be either male or female, and it is up to schools to allow students to tell us and show us who they are by providing a safe space for them to do so. Educators cannot assume, based on name, clothing, or other attributes, that a student is a certain gender. Instead, we need to follow their lead and affirm and respect their gender identities (Kahn, 2016). Since teachers do not always know if their students are cisgender or transgender, educators need to enter the classroom with no preconceived notions. To create a positive inclusive culture, teachers need to “get out of the habit of making assumptions about students’ gender” (Kahn, 2016, p. 72). If teachers are unsure about or do not know someone’s correct pronouns, it is best to ask rather than misgendering them (Kahn, 2016). Teachers also need to be aware of the tendency to make assumptions based on gender roles and stereotypes. They need to examine their own assumptions and play a proactive role in creating inclusive spaces. They also need to

use respectful language and behavior with transgender students to model inclusive civil behavior for all students.

Educating teachers is important, but it is also important to educate and inform parents, support staff, and other students about how to create an inclusive school environment. School counselors, nurses, and psychologists need to be competent in providing services and resources to transgender students and their families (Kahn, 2016). The American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2005) has called upon school counselors to foster an environment that provides respect of and affirmation for all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. School counselors are important to the creation of an inclusive school environment. They are expected to motivate systemic change using data to advocate for student success and working with students, parents, community members, and school personnel to bring about school change.

GLSEN (2016) has found that it is important for teachers to undergo professional development that helps them to become more aware of the biases that students face in schools and that better equips them to respond (GLSEN, 2016). Teachers who received professional development in LGBT issues or diversity and multicultural education were more likely to engage in LGBT supportive practices compared to teachers who did not receive professional development (see Figure 5). According to GLSEN (2016),

it is important to ensure adequate preparation for teachers through pre-service education and in-service professional development that specifically addresses multiple types of biased behaviors, including racism, sexism, classism, ableism, and homophobia, and that offers teachers opportunities to become familiar with effective ways to respond to bias so that they will be comfortable intervening. (p. 74)

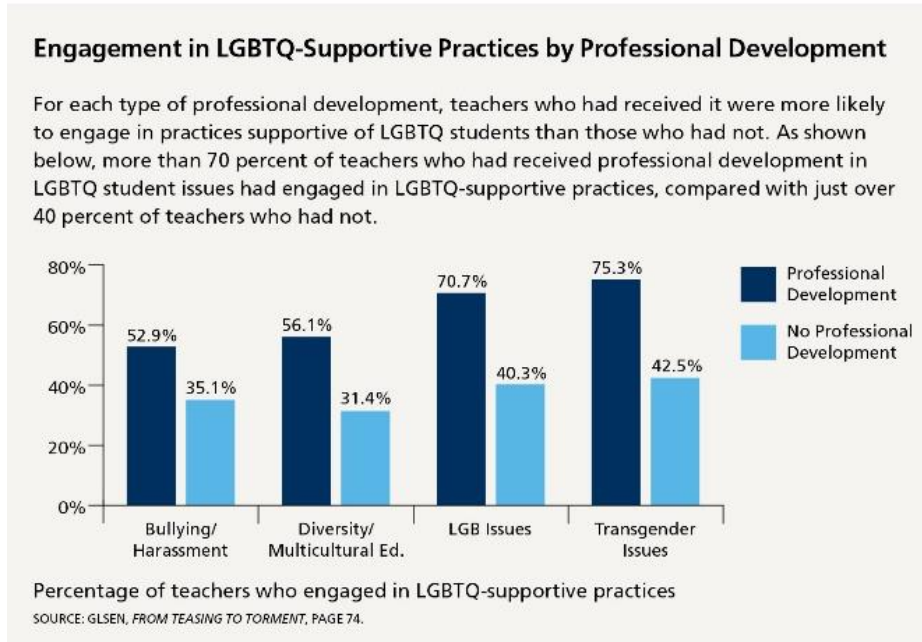


Figure 3. Engagement in LGBTQ-supportive practices.

Unfortunately, pre-service teachers are “unlikely to receive this type of professional development” (GLSEN, 2016). Jennings (2007) collected data from one hundred forty-two public universities across the United States that had elementary and secondary teacher preparation programs (representing the preparation of approximately 23,000 to 30,000 new teachers annually). The results indicated that race/ethnicity was the most emphasized diversity topic, followed by special needs, language diversity, economic (social class), gender, and sexual orientation. A majority of the programs addressed diversity topics across program classes. He found that states were similar in the priority that they assigned to various diversity topics, with the exception of California, which placed greater emphasis upon language diversity but less upon special needs compared to other states. There appeared to be little to no relationship between faculty’s gender and race and the priorities placed upon gender and racial diversity in programs.

School Leaders

School and district administrators play a pivotal role in school success (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013; Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Rice, 2010). School superintendents and building administrators can positively influence student achievement. Indeed, as the achievement gap between traditionally marginalized students and their peers widens, school leaders have a moral and ethical duty to close the achievement gap. Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001) suggested that to have a complete understanding of educational leadership, we need to learn not only what leaders do but also why and how they do it. For example, there is a need for school leaders to move from standardized test scores to embracing the ideas of social justice education, which involves a growth mindset and the education of the whole child. Sergiovani (1992, 2009), Fullan (2003), and others have discussed the moral and ethical responsibilities of school leaders concerning equity, social justice, and the needs of all students. Sergiovanni (2009) has stated that it is crucial for school administration to go beyond academic achievement by making a commitment to the democratic ideals of justice and equity.

It is the responsibility of school administrators to create an inclusive, welcoming school environment for all students. According to the American Psychological Association (APA, 2015), school leaders, especially building principals, need to create a school climate that supports the learning and healthy development of all students:

This is done in part by having strong anti-bullying and anti-discrimination policies and ensuring that these are enforced. It is at least as important to take a more pro-active stance by communicating regularly with all staff and students about how to build a positive school culture and how to create a shared school community where individual

differences are accepted and celebrated and where all students feel included and respected, regardless of their gender expression. (APA, p. 1-6)

Much of what school administrators can do involves educating themselves and their staff about gender issues and the needs of their students. They also need to ensure the basic human rights of all students, especially concerning bathrooms, locker rooms, sports, and physical education.

Another major issue that administrators should address is name and pronoun use:

All students have the right to be addressed by the name and pronoun that corresponds to their gender identity. A legal change of name or gender designation is not required.

Administrators should work with staff, students, and others to make sure that names and pronouns aligned with a student's gender identity are used consistently. (APA, 2015, p. 1-6)

In *Democracy and Education*, John Dewey argued that when it determines the activities of the young, society determines the future of the young (Dewey, 1944). Many teachers and school leaders believe that for true education change to take place, those in power need to listen to the stakeholders who are impacted most (Pizarro, 2005; Wilson & Corbett, 2001). School leaders need to look at ways to serve marginalized groups of students who have become relegated to the fringes of their communities, families, schools, and society because these marginalized students are often unsuccessful in school and suffer discrimination, violence, and bullying at the hands of their peers and others in their schools and communities. These students have fallen victim to current social, environmental, and political situations that affect their school engagement and identities as students.

For many students, school alienation, resistance, and marginalization are exacerbated by feelings that teachers do not care about them; in turn, they cease to care about school

(Valenzuela, 1999). Valenzuela (1999) argued that we must authentically care for our students by going beyond just academic preparation and realize the urgency to meet the “material, physical, psychological, and spiritual needs to guide the educational process” (p. 93). Our education system has overlooked the needs of too many students, especially those who are poor, who have special needs, who are students of color, and who are LGBTQ. Schools need to promote the educational and social integration of all students, especially transgender and gender nonconforming students. They need to ensure a safe learning environment that is free from violence, discrimination, and harassment. It is clear that there is a gap in the literature when it comes to studying the experiences of transgender and gender nonconforming youth in the United States.

Queer Perspectives

Feminist and Queer Theories embrace the fluidity of sexuality and gender identity and assert that these constructs may be influenced by social interactions and unequal power structures within society (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). Beemyn (2003) discussed a transgender community that is dealing with deeper issues by “shifting the discussion of transgenderism from a personal disorder to a cultural one,” emphasizing “the inability of society to move beyond narrow gender categories” (p. 10). A queer framework affirms that gender fluidity is normal. Renn (2010) stated that many studies on transgender students have focused on school climate and the accommodations that should be made for gender variant individuals. Renn argued that research conducted through the lens of queer theory enables researchers to assess and deconstruct the power structures that exist in society and education that marginalizes gender variant individuals who do not conform to the normative, binary conception of gender and sexuality. Queer theory explores issues of sexuality, power, and marginalized populations in

literature and culture. It is influenced by feminist theory and builds on the ideas of Nietzsche, Derrida, and Foucault to discuss gender and sexuality. Queer and Feminist Theory in education focuses on changing what teachers teach and what the students read and learn.

Sense of Self and Suicidal Ideation

Suicidal ideation is a problem associated with the LGBTQ community. A national study conducted by Russell and Joyner (2001) found that middle and high school students who identified as LGBTQ were twice as likely to have attempted suicide than their heterosexual peers. A 2007 survey conducted by Grossman and D'Augelli reported that 25% of the transgender students who participated said that they had attempted suicide.

Summary

As increasing numbers of high school students identify openly as transgender and gender nonconforming, they navigate violence, discrimination, and harassment from peers and others. Scholarly work on trans issues in education has positioned transgender and gender nonconforming students within the larger grouping of LGBTQ individuals. This review of the literature has made it clear that higher education is making strides in addressing the needs of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. However, there is still a lack of literature that addresses the needs and experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming youth at the secondary level. The literature that does exist that secondary schools can draw upon to address the experiences of queer youth, is not specific to transgender and gender non-conforming students.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study attempted to understand the high school experiences of transgender and gender nonconforming youth. This chapter provides an overview of the study's qualitative research design. According to Merriam (2002), qualitative research proceeds with the idea that individuals socially construct meaning through their interactions with their worlds. Key characteristics of qualitative research include a focus on understanding meaning, the researcher serving as the primary instrument, an inductive approach to research, and inquiry that is richly descriptive (Merriam, 2002). The emphasis in study was on the direct and personal experiences of transgender and gender nonconforming youth led the researcher to use a qualitative design.

Purpose of the Study

Research has suggested that transgender and gender nonconforming students face issues of bias from peers, teachers, and staff who are not aware of how to address transgender and gender non-conforming students, including proper pronoun use and correct transgender terminology. The 2015 National School Climate Report conducted by GLSEN reported that "fifty percent of transgender students had been prevented from using their preferred name or pronoun" (GLSEN, 2015, p. xvii). Transgender students also face violence, negative school climates, and discriminatory school policies. "Gender nonconforming cisgender students experienced worse school climates compared to gender conforming cisgender students" (GLSEN, 2015, p. 41-49). Students often encounter peers and adults who have little or no knowledge of the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity. This study provided transgender and gender nonconforming eighteen to twenty-year olds the opportunity to reflect on

their high school experiences and give voice to their lived experiences through oral and visual mediums.

This was a qualitative study primarily utilizing approaches from photo voice and phenomenology. A qualitative approach allows for rich and thick description of the lived high school experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Patton, 2002). It is my hope that this study will provide teachers, school leaders, school districts, and legislative bodies with an awareness of the needs of transgender and gender nonconforming students.

Methodology

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005),
Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the institutional constraints that shape the inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of the inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning. (p.10)

In order to give meaning to the social experience of transgender and gender nonconforming youth, photovoice within the phenomenological tradition was employed. “Participant photographs are to be interpreted by the participants; the participants’ narrations of those photographs are the data typically relegated to the interpretation of the researcher” (Lutz, 2017, p. 74). Applying photovoice, data collection in the study revolved around twenty-five photographs taken by each participant and three interviews with each participant wherein the photographs were thoroughly discussed.

Photovoice



Figure 4. Photovoice process

Photovoice, which has its roots in social activism, is an art-based qualitative methodology that aims to create positive social change. It is rooted in the theoretical assumptions of critical consciousness, feminist theory, and documentary photography (Wang & Burris, 1997).

Photovoice is a participatory research approach. Photovoice creates spaces and opportunities for individual and collective voices to be heard. It was originally used in a study about rural women.

Burris and Wang (1994) developed the photovoice methodology as a way to give voice to marginalized, disempowered, and unheard groups in society. Along with photovoice, aspects of phenomenology were employed in this study. The combined aspects of these methodologies provided for a rich interpretation of the lived experiences of transgender youth. Given the limited amount of literature on the lived high school experiences of transgender and gender non-

conforming youth, the photos, subsequent interviews, and narratives addressed the needs of this growing community.

Photovoice provided participants with an active role in the research process. “Photovoice oscillates between private and public worlds in an attempt to publicize and politicize personal struggle via photography, narratives, critical dialogue, and social action” (Sutton-Brown, 2014, p. 70). Since its development in the 1990s, photovoice has helped researchers to study marginalized individuals whose voices are usually stifled by those in power. Participants are provided with cameras so they may document, discuss, and display past experiences, concerns, and hopes for the future as seen through their eyes. This helps to empower marginalized individuals who usually spend time under the lens of the photographer by allowing them the opportunity to be behind the lens (Willson, Green, Hayworth-Brockman, & Beck, 2006). The power of photovoice lies in the participants acting as experts on their own lived experiences (Wang & Burris, 1997). As defined by Wang and Burris (1997), photovoice has three goals: (a) enable people to record and reflect their community’s strengths and concerns; (b) promote communication and knowledge about personal and community issues through discussions focused on the photographs; and (c) help bring about social change.

Photovoice can be used to raise consciousness within participants through dialogue, to reach policymakers, and to show stakeholders new ways to create positive change within the community (Wang & Buris, 1997). Another goal of photovoice research is to reach multiple audiences by making scholarship more accessible. Arts-based inquiry and photovoice are committed to connecting the work of academia with the lives of people in the community through research that is accessible, evocative, empathetic, and stimulating (Cole & Knowles, 2008). “Art, in any of its various forms, provides a medium for self-reflection, self-expression,

and communication between and among creators and audiences” (Finely, 2005, p. 692). This study provided an opportunity for transgender and gender non-conforming youth to explore and share their lived experiences and the issues that affect their lives.

Photovoice has many advantages for the individuals involved: (a) for those that are marginalized; (b) for those who hold power; and (c) for the community at large. To marginalized individuals, photovoice provides the opportunity to represent and enhance their own communities by taking pictures and telling stories of their lived experiences. It may enhance self-esteem and peer status, express appreciation, and build community. The process of creating visual images is often a source of empowerment, as are interviews that affirm the participants’ struggle and give researchers insight into the participants’ experiences (Wang, Burris, & Ping, 1996). Using this method with a marginalized population whose voice is often unheard in society, or whose image is often misrepresented in the media, can be a catalyst for reform. Wang and Burris (1997) emphasized that photographs do not just tell a story; they also teach us about ourselves and our communities. Photovoice has the power to make those who are invisible visible (Bukowski & Buetow, 2011).

Phenomenology

The combination of photovoice and phenomenology was used in this research to elicit both individual and shared experiential meanings of transgender and gender nonconforming youth. Photovoice is a vehicle to “elicit phenomenological data when researching the lived experience” (Plunkett, 2013, p. 877-889). However, without the use of phenomenology, the photographs would not tell the whole story of the lived experiences of the participants. Phenomenology is the study of lived experiences, meanings, and knowledge that are constructed by the individuals as they interact with the world in which they are living (Crotty, 1998). In

phenomenology, the researcher seeks to interpret the lived experience of a phenomenon into a textual expression “in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful” (van Manen, 1997, p. 36). Phenomenological research describes how participants live through their experiences and then create meaning from those experiences (van Manen, 1990), including “how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others” (Patton, 2002, p. 104).

In this study, I asked participants to use their own words to describe their reflective high school experiences as transgender and gender non-conforming. The interviews provided a deep, rich understanding of the lived experiences of transgender and gender nonconforming individuals as they reflected on their high school experiences. The semi-structured interviews were designed to explore the lived secondary school experiences of transgender and gender nonconforming individuals. Participants were asked to attend an interview scheduled for approximately forty-five to sixty minutes. Interviews are an effective technique for collecting data about the lived experience of participants (Van den Berg, 2005). The interviews added to the photographs rich descriptions of the lived experiences of the participants.

Role of the Researcher

In my role as the primary data collection instrument, it was necessary to identify my own personal values, assumptions, and biases at the outset of the study. I come to this topic to give voice to all my transgender and gender nonconforming students. In 2015, I was asked to attend a meeting in the principal’s office. The principal explained to me that one of my students from the year before had transitioned over the summer. The student went from female to male and would now like to be addressed as Ira (name has been changed to protect the individual). Since I no longer had the student in my class, I asked why I was being given this information, and the

principal said that the student requested that I be informed. Ira began the school year fighting for a gender-neutral bathroom, which the school provided: The school took a female faculty restroom and turned it into a gender-neutral bathroom. What began as a student fighting for his rights turned into snickers and anger among the faculty. I heard comments like, “Why do those students need their own bathroom. He-She should just go to the nurse’s office.” The derogatory term He-She was used by several faculty members in reference to this and other issues surrounding transgender and gender non-conforming students. These comments and other issues that arose that school year brought me to this topic.

Working in secondary education for over three decades has led to several biases that I hold with respect to the treatment of all students. I may be a straight white woman, but there are many people I love who are marginalized. This bias may have shaped the way that I viewed and interpreted the data. However, I made every effort to be objective so that I could accurately unpack the phenomenon. I used journaling and bracketing as methods to minimize the effect of my bias on my data analysis and interpretation.

Participants

Creswell (1998) suggested that phenomenological studies include up to ten participants, I aimed to have ten to fifteen transgender and gender non-conforming participants for this photo voice study. There is a high rate of participant attrition in photovoice studies. Latz (2017) found a 50% percent or more attrition rate in her own studies. Since there is such a high attrition rate, I aimed to have a minimum of ten participants who were transgender and gender non-conforming youth between the ages of eighteen and twenty and who would be offered an opportunity to reflect on their personal experiences during high school. I decided on this age group because I was seeking data on the reflective high school experiences of transgender and gender

nonconforming individuals. To recruit participants for this study, I used social media (see Appendix A) and flyers (Appendix B) with a link to a demographic survey. Potential participants were able to click on a link and be brought to the demographic survey, which was created using Qualtrics. The demographic survey contained the following questions:

- Do you consider yourself a member of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and/or Transgender (LGBT) community?
- What is your gender?
- Do you identify as transgender or gender non-conforming?
- What is your age? Would you be interested in sharing your high school experiences?

(See Appendix C.)

A brief description of the study was included in the social media blast and on the flyer. The goal was to have ten to twenty individuals who met the eligibility criteria agree to participate.

The eligibility requirements for this study were that the participants were transgender or gender nonconforming individuals between the ages of eighteen and twenty. Once the demographic surveys were complete, I used the demographic survey information to help me choose my study participants. Since the age group of my participants (eighteen to twenty) encompassed individuals who are accustomed to social media, recruitment through Facebook was appropriate. I created a dedicated email address and Facebook account for this project. Due to the absence of widely accepted gender-neutral pronouns, and to protect participants' confidentiality, all participants are hereafter referenced by the personal pronoun "they." Once I had my participants, I spoke with them via telephone, Google hangouts, or in person to discuss the photovoice process. I wanted the participants to understand how the project would unfold and the importance of their role in the process as well as why the project was being done.

Communication between the participants and myself was ongoing so that I could answer any questions the participants may have had.

Data Collection Tools

The data collection revolved around the twenty-five photographs taken by each participant as well as three interviews with each participant where the photographs were discussed. In photovoice research, “Participant photographs are to be interpreted by the participants; the participants’ narrations of those photographs are the data typically relegated to the interpretation of the researcher” (Lutz, 2017, p. 74). During the narration phase of the data collection, I asked questions that would help me to interpret and experience the world of the participant. Much of John Dewey’s writing centers on “experience.” Dewey was concerned with helping every student to have the “full and ready use of all his capacities” (Dewey, 1897, p. 77-80). According to Dewey, to help every student succeed, educators must first understand how that student was shaped by their lived experiences (Dewey, 1934). The use of photography as data for this study also gave the participants an opportunity to create art. In *Art as Experience*, John Dewey stated that art is a unique form of experience that carries the potential to be a part of shaping individuals and societies: “Whatever path the work of art pursues, it, just because it is a full and intense experience, keeps alive the power to experience the common world in its fullness. It does so by reducing the raw materials of that experience to matter ordered through form” (Dewey, 1934, p. 132).

Security of Data

Audio data were stored digitally. A benefit of using a digital format includes the secure collection and storage of data. An external hard drive was used to store all data, and the external hard drive was kept secure. All printed photographs were stored in a locked file cabinet). I used

verbatim scripts of transcribed data. Transcripts were transcribed using a transcription service. All transcribed interviews and all data were kept secure.

Procedures

Purposive sampling was used to obtain participants. A purposive sample is a non-probability sample. In this study, participants were selected based on specific characteristics (transgender, transitioning, and gender nonconforming high school students between the ages of eighteen and twenty). I used snowball sampling to recruit additional transgender and gender nonconforming youth: Study participants were invited to share information about the study with other youth who would be willing to consider participating, were given flyers to pass out to friends and acquaintances and encouraged to share the recruitment Facebook page.

Once I had obtained all of my participants for the study, I met with all participants to explain the photovoice process; at that meeting, I gave them consent and release forms. If the meeting was not done in person, the consent forms were emailed to the participants. Participants shared ideas and concerns about their experiences in high school and in their communities. They also took on the role of photographers to capture photographic evidence that represented their lived experiences. Participants could also include other photographs that they wanted to discuss.

It was important to gain informed consent and consent to release the photography during the first meeting. I used several consent and release forms: participant's consent to be part of the study (Appendix D); individual's consent to be photographed, for other individuals who appear in photographs (Appendix E); photographed individuals' consent to allow the photographs to be published (Appendix F); and participant/photographers consent to allow the images to be published (Appendix G). If the participants took pictures of minors, there was a consent form for parents/guardians (Appendix H). All consent forms were kept secure.

Each participant was asked to provide the researcher with twenty-five photos. Each participant was given the option to use their mobile device/smart phone or a digital camera provided by the researcher. They were also provided a tutorial on how to use the digital camera if they choose to use it. Participants who borrowed a digital camera were provided with a SIM card for storage of the photos, and that card was returned to the researcher along with the camera. To those who preferred to use their smart phone/mobile devices, the researcher provided the email address dedicated for this project for image forwarding. Participants were also invited to share existing personal photos that told of their experiences in high school (e.g., yearbook photos, prom pictures, etc.). If they supplied the researcher with such a photo, copies were made, and the originals were returned. The advantages of using photographs are that participants may not be comfortable discussing their gender and sexual identity directly, and some experiences may be better expressed through photographs. Photographs are also a good way to break the ice between researchers and participants, making both more comfortable.

There are many ways that researchers could give guidance to participants about discussing their photographs: (a) completely open, using perhaps one prompt or frame; (b) general focus: scripted (prompts); and (c) participant-driven scripts, where participants decide on the parameters (Tinkler, 2013, p. 156). Photo prompts are important to ensure that participants can document their reflective high school experiences. According to Latz (2017), photo prompts “should be open-ended; they can take the form of questions, directive statements, or fill-in-the-blank statements” (p. 71). If participants needed some guidance, they could use the following prompts:

- How did school make you feel?
- Friends?

- Teachers, administrators, staff?
- Classroom experiences – curriculum, students, teachers
- Did you like school?
- What does diversity mean to you?
- A typical day at school includes (fill in the blank by taking some photographs).
- Did you feel safe at school?
- What does safety look like?
- Describes your life during high school?
- Old photos?

After the photographs were emailed to the researcher from participants, they were put into PowerPoint format and an interview session was held with each participant. The photographs were used to prompt the interview responses. The use of photographs is called photo-elicitation (Harper, 1986). Collier and Collier (1986) described photo-elicitation as an interview in which the participants and the researcher discuss the photographs together. Collier and Collier (1986) wrote that “asking questions of the photographs and the participants became our assistants in discovering the answers to these questions in the realities of the photographs” (p. 105). Collier and Collier also stated that photo-elicitation relieves the stress of being the focus the conversation that many informants feel, especially when discussing gender identity: “Instead, their role can be one of the expert guides leading the fieldworker through the content of the pictures” (Collier & Collier, 1986, p. 106). This allowed participants the opportunity to tell their stories spontaneously. Participants were able to sort and label their photographs as well as explain the objects in the photographs, what they meant, their origins, and what elements may have been missing (Harper, 1986). As Collier and Collier (1986) explained, “photographic

interviewing offers a detachment that allows the maximum free association possible within structured interviewing” (p. 107). The researcher conducted three separate interviews with each of the participants to explore the meaning of the participants’ experiences in the context of their lives (Seidman, 1995).

After the researcher met with participants to explain their role in the study and answer any questions they had, I gave them a date to have digital photographs emailed to me. Once the researcher received all the digital photographs from participants, hard copies of each photograph were made. Interview dates were scheduled with each participant. There was a series of two to three interviews with each participant.

Photovoice is an evolutionary process. Data collection begins in the early stages of the project and continues through the entire process. Since data collection takes place over several meetings, it is constantly changing and evolving. Each interview, presentation of individual photographs, and sharing of participants’ experiences with their photographs produces additional data. Narratives accompanied the photographs and the participants gave a title to each photo. The researcher audio recorded the interviews and numbered the photographs so that corresponding taped stories could be linked to each photograph. The researcher used an open-ended semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix H, I, and J) and labeled the photographs to begin the data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 69).

Interviews

Interview #1

First round interviews were narrative. Participants discussed “the images that they have produced, and by doing so, they will give meaning to or interpret their images” (Wang, 1999, p. 186). The result is that “participants’ narrations of the photographs are the data relegated to the

interpretations of the researcher” (Latz, 2017, p. 74). The first-round interviews allowed for the participants’ input with in-depth discussions of each photograph. The hope was that the participants would be able to explain what each photograph means to them instead of the researcher applying meanings to the photographs and labels for them.

During the first interview, participants were given the photos the title and caption for the photographs they created. It was my hope, through this discussion, that different layers of meaning would be unveiled about the way the photos “reconstruct” the story of the participant’s high school experiences (Seidman, 2013). Participants selected the images they wanted to talk about in the interview. This allowed them to be in control of the interview and the discussion topics. The participants also choose the order in which we discussed the photographs, giving them the power to guide the interview process (Appendix H).

Interview #2

The in-depth interviews concentrated on the details of the participants’ lived experience. For this semi-structured interview, the researcher asked participants to talk about high school in general: their friends, their teachers, the classes they took, and any other important details that provide a more precise insight into the phenomenon. As Wagner (1979) stated, “photographs never tell us all we want to know but they can provide an excellent vehicle for asking important questions” (p. 289; Appendix I).

Interview #3

The third interviews were reflections on what the high school experience meant to the participants. We also revisited the photographs to see if the participants wanted to change the photographs that they wished to include in the study and to discuss how these photographs reflected their high school experiences. This interview was meant to “address the intellectual

and emotional connections” between the participants and their photographs (Seidman, 2013; Appendix J).

Each interview was approximately an hour to an hour-and-a-half long and was spaced from three days to a week apart, leaving time for the participants to think over the preceding interviews. Participant information that was gathered will not be shared with anyone. The information that was collected and kept private. Participants were assigned a pseudonym. The researcher is the only person who knows the participants’ pseudonyms, and all information has been locked up with a lock and key. It will not be shared with or given to anyone.

Interviews were recorded using a live scribe pen. The recorded interviews were sent to a transcriptionist. When the transcripts were returned, each participant was sent a copy of their interview to make sure they were accurate, and it gave participants an opportunity to add or delete information.

Data Analysis

Once all the interviews were completed, the researcher transcribed the audio recordings from each participant interview. Upon completion of the direct transcription of each interview, the researcher identified emergent themes using in vivo, emotion, process, and descriptive coding. Once the first coding was completed for each interview, I utilized in vivo software to cross-reference each interview to identify common word repetitions that were then categorized into themes.

In vivo software by QSR is designed to help researchers organize, analyze, and find insights in unstructured, qualitative data like interviews, open-ended survey responses, articles, social media, and web content. Since the researcher was interested in the lived high school experiences of transgender and gender nonconforming youth and the meanings that they assigned

to objects, people, places, and events in their reflective experiences, as expressed through their photographs. The researcher borrowed aspects of analysis techniques from interpretive phenomenology to analyze the data from the interview sessions. Interpretive phenomenological analysis, as described by Smith and Osborn (2008), explores how participants make sense of their past personal and social high school experiences and the particular situations they faced by focusing on the meanings that various experiences, events, and situations held for them. In the first stage of analysis, the researcher read and reviewed the transcripts to become as familiar with the accounts, and each reading afforded an opportunity to find new information. The researcher then reread the transcript and started searching for themes, recurrent patterns, layers of meaning, and interconnections. The analysis was concerned with trying to understand what participants' experiences in high school were like, from their points of view.

Wang and Burris (1997) described a three-stage approach to data analysis: selecting, contextualizing, and codifying. The participants selected the photographs that told of their high school experiences; the participant's selection of photographs created the material needed for contextualizing these experiences. Contextualizing occurred in various ways: through caption writing and storytelling, issues, themes, or theories emerged from the interviews. Tinkler (2013) proposed the following procedure for analyzing a photo interview:

- What do the participants see?
- How do the photos express the lived experiences of the participants?
- What is said and what is not said?
- How does the discussion compare with the photographs?
- How do the participants interact with the photographs? (pp. 193–194)

The researcher also analyzed the photos themselves in a separate stage of analysis. Each photo was analyzed as well as the combined collection of photos to see if common themes and recurrent patterns, meaning, and interconnections emerged from them. Saldaña suggested that “the best approach to analyzing visual data is a holistic, interpretive lens guided by intuitive inquiry and strategic questions” (p. 52). Analytic memo writing and bracketing was used at the beginning of the coding process “to document and reflect on the coding processes, coding choices, patterns, categories, subcategories, themes, and concepts” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 41).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to how a researcher can “persuade his or her audiences that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to and worth taking account of” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). The evaluative criteria used to establish reliability and validity in quantitative research are not particularly relevant for evaluating the trustworthiness of qualitative research. Instead, alternative evaluative phraseology such as “consistency,” “truth value,” and “neutrality” are advocated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As Lincoln and Guba have recommended, the researcher incorporated multiple strategies related to validity, which enhanced my ability to assess the accuracy of the findings. The researcher checked transcripts for accuracy, compared coding to data, and maintained separate memos during the coding process. To ensure validity, the following strategies were used; member checking, and rich, thick description. Member checking was implemented by requesting that the participants review the themes and initial analysis of the data to ensure that these were interpreted accurately. Member checking provided a means of assessing trustworthiness by ensuring that participants’ experiences were accurately represented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Lastly, the use of rich, thick description was incorporated throughout the analysis. “When qualitative researchers provide

detailed descriptions of the setting the results become more realistic and richer” (Creswell, 1998, p. 192).

Coding of Photographs

First Cycle Coding of Photographs

In Vivo coding was used to give “voice” to participants’ lived experiences. Participants were active in providing the meanings of their photographs through titling and captioning. The photographs and the in-depth discussions about each photograph were used to capture their voices. The purpose was to make sure that we had captured the richness of the lived experiences of the participants. Direct quotes were used as well as memo writing to make sure that the issues and themes from the participants lived experiences were captured.

Second Cycle Coding of Photographs

According to Saldaña, second cycle coding is used to “develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual and theoretical organization from the first cycle codes” (p. 207). With process coding, the researcher was able to identify recurrent patterns and categories. By doing this, the researcher was able to see variations and interconnections within the themes. This led to a rearranging of the topics; emotion coding was also used to get a richer deeper understanding of participants’ emotional experiences.

Coding of Interviews

First Cycle Coding of Interviews

In Vivo coding was used to give “voice” to the participants. Participants were active in providing the meanings of their photographs through labeling them as well as in-depth discussions of them. I wanted to capture their voices and capture the richness of participants’ lived experiences. Direct quotes were used as well as in vivo and descriptive coding to ensure

that the researcher captured the issues, patterns, and themes from the participants' lived experiences.

Second Cycle Coding of Interviews

During the second coding cycle process coding was used to identify recurrent patterns and categories to see the variations within and interconnections among the themes. This led to a rearranging of the topics and ideas. Emotion coding and value coding were also used to uncover a more in-depth description of the lived high school experiences of the participants. To get to the essence of the "lived experiences" of the participants, Saldaña recommends that researchers listen repeatedly to the audio recording of each interview, becoming familiar with the words of the interviewees in order to develop a holistic sense of their lived experiences. In the descriptive coding analysis process, Saldaña recommends that the researcher first chronologically bracket the commentary and begin a reduction of the information. The data reduction process begins with open coding and interpretive memoing wherein the researcher identifies the words that best represent emerging topics that might serve to form categories of meaning. Next, the researcher identifies the salient points that developed within the data to shape the evolution of core topics. The final stage requires the researcher to think deeply about the evolving categories and search for alternative understanding before converting the emergent categories into thematic units. Creswell (2007) suggested that researchers search for patterns by "pulling the data apart and putting them back together in more meaningful ways" (p. 163). Through this strategic puzzling, my hope was to discover how transgender and gender nonconforming students experience high school.

During the data collection process the researcher maintained a collection of news articles. These articles were collected from the date of proposal to present. The researcher began

following different LGBTQ organization on Facebook and other news outlets such as the Huffington Post and the New York Times. The researcher has accumulated over three hundred and seventy-five articles that document the the changing political and social landscape of the United States in the past year and it's positive and negative impact on the transgender and gender non-conforming population. (Appendix N)

Exhibition/Presentation

It is the intention of the researcher to hold an exhibition/presentation to showcase the lived high school experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. Participants will decide which photographs to be included in the exhibit. Community members, faculty, and individuals with connections to education will be invited to attend. One of the goals of photovoice is to affect social change, and a photo exhibit is a powerful way to portray this type of research.

Ethical Considerations

Participation in this research was voluntary. Names of all participants were changed to protect each from being "outed." Participant information was kept confidential and anonymity was ensured at all times. As noted, the researcher used several consent and release forms (Appendices D, E, F, G). All consent forms and photographs were kept secure for the duration of the study. Participants were told in advance how the photographs would be used. Since participant-generated photographs can pose challenges to confidentiality and privacy, participants were made aware of the importance of obtaining consent from any individuals that appeared in their photographs. Arrangements were made to block or pixilate the faces of any individuals who did not want to appear in photographs. Interviews/discussions were transcribed in Microsoft Word and stored on the researcher's password-protected laptop. Audio files from

interviews were saved on a flash drive and secured in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home office.

Reporting the Findings

After thick descriptions and themes related to the data were developed, results were reported on the detailed secondary school experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming young adults. When possible and appropriate, I embedded quotes from participants, presented textual information in a tabular form, and used wording from the participants to form codes and theme labels. Additional strategies for reporting the data included the use of metaphors and analogies, as well as the use of the narrative forms to express the deep, rich experiences of the participants. Once themes and findings were complete the researcher sent a copy to several youth mental health counselors and high school psychologists. This was done for fact checking purposes. One school psychologist stated:

Thank you for sharing your findings. In my experience with this population, yes, this aligns with how the students feel. It saddens me however, that I know that these students sometimes have a negative view toward faculty because they have a tendency to be hyper focused on their own identity and have little to no tolerance for those who aren't as "woke" as they see themselves to be.

Another school psychologist said:

These findings are in keeping with students experiences in my building and general societal norms. I have heard from other mental health professionals about bias school policies in this area well beyond what I have seen or heard about at my school- but that's not to say that we don't have a long way to go to help these individuals feel supported, included and above all safe. Further, we all need to do

a better job of serving the psychiatrically fragile population when they return to our building, not just your population that you studied- so these findings are also in keeping with my experiences. Thank you for shining a light on this important topic and marginalized group.

Many of the replies just stated that the findings were in line with what they were seeing in their schools or hearing from their patients.

Limitations

The limitations of this study were that I was be relying on young adults to show me, and tell me about, their stories of high school and their classroom experiences. Wang and Burris (1997) cautioned that photographs are easy to gather but difficult to analyze and summarize. For this reason, I met with each participant three times. This gave the participants time to share their reflective experiences of high school.

Compensation

Subjects were not compensated monetarily for their participation in this study.

Summary

For this qualitative research study, I used photovoice and phenomenology to understand the lived experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. Transgender and gender non-conforming young adults were asked to reflect on their high school experiences through taking and sharing photographs and through interviews based on both the photographs and on high school experiences. The transcribed interviews and photographs were then analyzed, and codes and themes were sent to all participants for member checking.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

This chapter presents the analysis of the findings of a photovoice study that included aspects of phenomenology to explore the lived high school experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming young adults. The existing research and literature discussing the high school experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming young adults has focused on medical and psychological interventions, risk determinants, negative behavior, harassment, and victimization. Other research and literature that has focused on members of the broader LGBTQ community and their high school experiences compelled me to investigate these lived experiences. Methods common to photovoice and phenomenological research guided my data collection and analysis. The results are a culmination of photo elicitation, an open-ended questionnaire, and semi structured in person interviews. The participants shared candid and deeply emotional perspectives on their lived high school experiences.

The major research question for this study was, “How do transgender and gender non-conforming young adults perceive their experience in public secondary school?” The sub questions were, “How do transgender and gender non-conforming students encounter policies and practices that they perceive to be inclusive of their marginalized status?”; “How do they believe these policies and practices fail to protect their rights?”; and “How does school culture support or inhibit the needs of transgender and gender nonconforming students?” The investigation focused on the lived experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals.

Participant Information

Participants were gathered using a survey created on Qualtrics. The survey contained six questions and a consent form. The survey was then posted on the social media site, Facebook. The post included the research's background information for needing participants. (See Appendix M)

Facebook friends, family, and others shared the introductory statement on their Facebook page and a recruitment poster was shared at several colleges and universities in New Hampshire, New York, Utah, Maryland, and Florida. The Facebook post and the poster generated two hundred fourteen responses from across the United States. The Qualtrics survey was open for thirty days, between September 27, 2018 and October 28, 2018. During that time, the *New York Times* ran an article about the Trump Administration's Department of Health and Human Services memo to federal agencies that would "erase" the legal status of millions of transgender people by using Title IX to impose a definition of gender as "immutable biological traits identifiable by or before birth."

Of the two hundred and fourteen responses, eighty-one respondents, or 38%, considered themselves to be an ally. An ally, according to GLSEN (2011), "is an individual who speaks out and stands up for a person or group that is targeted and discriminated against. An ally works to end oppression by supporting and advocating for people who are stigmatized, discriminated against or treated unfairly" (2011, pg. 5). Allies are not a new phenomenon. During all social movements in American history, there have been allies. From the abolitionists of the 1800s, the Men's League for Woman Suffrage during the 1900s, and the Freedom Riders during the Civil Rights Movement, allies have been working for social justice and change. "For the lesbian, gay,

bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities, an ally is any person who supports and stands up for the rights of LGBT people” (GLSEN, 2011, p. 5).

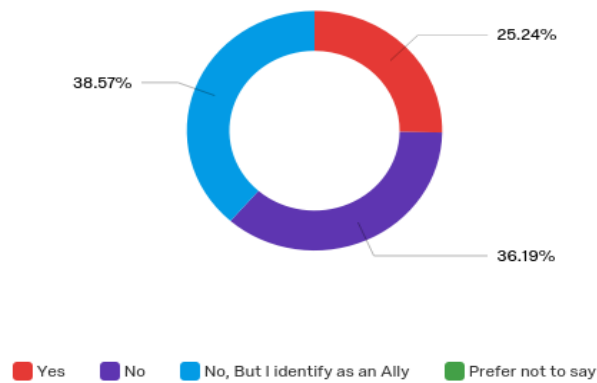


Figure 5. Number of LGBTQ+ respondents.

Of the two hundred fourteen respondents, fifty-two considered themselves members of the LGBTQ community. A 2018 Gallup Poll found that 4.5% of the U.S. population identifies as LGBTQ+ (Gallup, Inc., 2018). Of the fifty-two respondents who identified as LGBTQ, eighteen identified as transgender. The Williams Institute study found that 1.4 million adults ages eighteen and older identify as transgender. (2016)

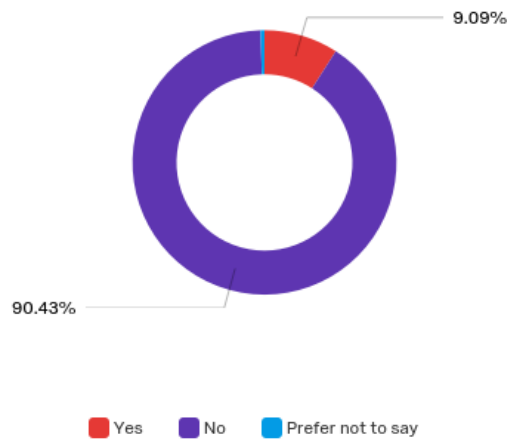


Figure 6. *Number of respondents that identify as transgender.*

Out of the fifty-two respondents who identified as LGBTQ, only thirteen identified as gender non-conforming. Gender non-conforming, as defined by GLSEN (2014), is “a descriptive term and/or identity of a person who has a gender identity and/or expression that does not conform to the traditional expectations of the gender they were assigned at birth” (p.2). People who identify as “gender nonconforming” or “gender variant” may or may not also identify as “transgender.”

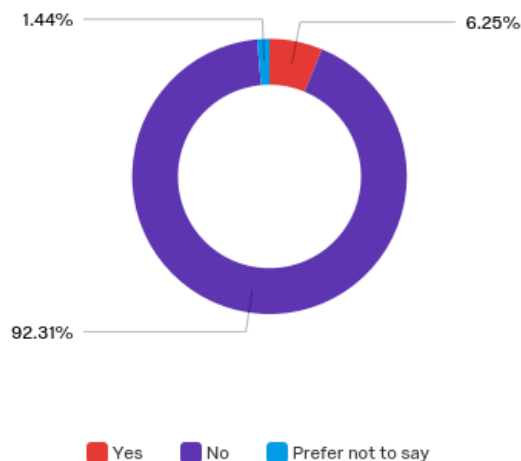


Figure 7. *Number of respondents that identify as gender non-conforming.*

Out of the two hundred fourteen responses to the demographic survey, only forty-three respondents were interested in participating in the study. Of these forty-three respondents interested in participating, twenty-two were part of the LGBTQ community, eighteen were transgender or gender non-conforming, and only four agreed to be interviewed and take photographs. Seventeen of the respondents were over the age of twenty-one and the respondents came from nine states, including Florida, Georgia, Maryland, California, Utah, Connecticut, New York, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts.

The researcher emailed those who said they were interested in participating. Of the eighteen that said they were interested, only 4 agreed to move forward with the project and take photographs and be interviewed. An additional individual agreed to be interviewed only, one participant provided photos, titles and captions and then the individual dropped out of the study before the second interview. The design of this study was to interview seven to ten individuals, however there was a limited response to participate who were interested in being interviewed. The small sample size was adequate in that it generated rich and descriptive data (photographs and narratives) of the lived high school experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals, while at the same time maintaining a manageable number of photographs for the group discussion.

The researcher then created a questionnaire with open-ended questions and contacted the individuals that said they wanted to participate in the study but did not want to be interviewed and asked if they would complete the questionnaire. Eighteen questionnaires were sent out. The questionnaire contained twelve open-ended questions that enabled respondents the opportunity to freely express their opinions and share their high school experiences. Of the eighteen

questionnaires that were sent out, seventeen questionnaires were returned. Respondents of the questionnaire were eighteen and older with 75% of respondents being age twenty-six or older.

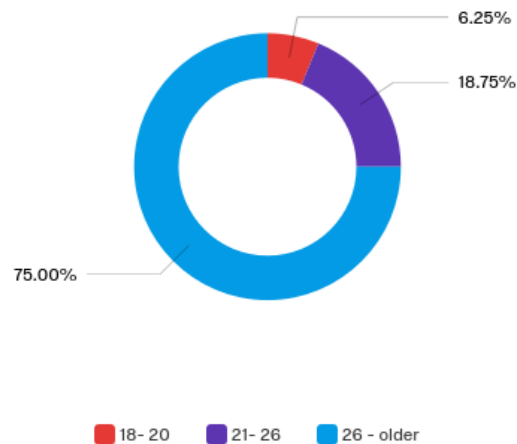


Figure 8. *Ages of questionnaire respondents*

Thirty-five percent of the respondents said that they identified as transgender, 7% stated that they identified as gender non-conforming, and 35% identified as allies.

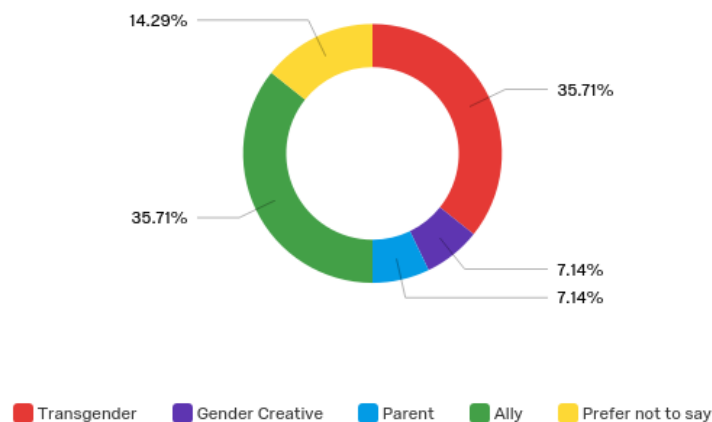


Figure 9. *How respondents identify.*

Responses to the questionnaire were from around the country including New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Florida, Utah and California with representation from private, charter and public high schools.

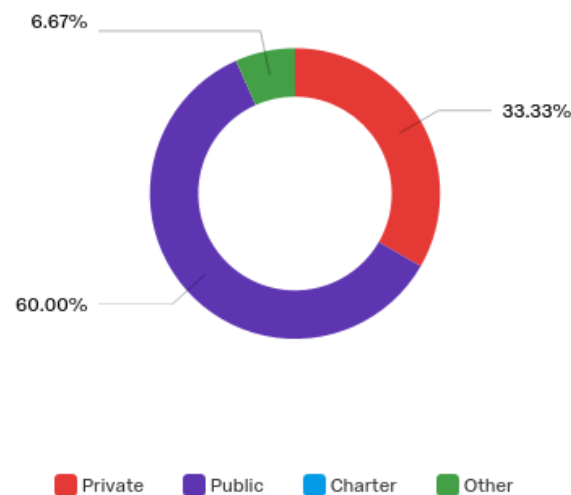


Figure 10. Type of high school.

Coding and Analysis

Analytical memorandums were created to reflect insights from the responses to the questionnaires. The data collected from the questionnaire responses was coded using in vivo coding, process coding and values coding. In the first round of coding, in vivo coding was used. In vivo coding uses “the participant’s own language” (Saldaña, 2018, p. 121). The in vivo codes from the questionnaires revealed that transgender and gender non-conforming individuals indicated that they felt unsafe in their high schools and several indicated being threatened by administrators. For example, one participant stated,

I almost got suspended for prom posing to my girlfriend. I had something simple planned, I had flowers and a poster I made to present to her at lunch, but the

administration was obviously against LGBTQ and tried as hard as he could to get me suspended.

“Oppression,” “discrimination,” “fear,” “disrespect,” and “condescending” were all words used to describe how transgender and gender non-conforming students felt about their relationships with some teachers, administrators, and staff. One participant stated that “there was no separation between teacher’s personal beliefs and their actions in class.” Some participants felt that their high schools were dismissive of their experiences, that administration did not respond to issues of bullying, and that instances of bullying were hidden. Questionnaire participants also indicated that school clubs like GSA (Gay Straight Alliance) or an LGBTQ club were important because they provided both gay and straight students with a place to talk about issues important to them. This idea is supported in the 2017 GLSEN National School Climate report, which stated that GSA and LGBTQ student organizations “can positively affect LGBTQ students’ school experiences” (GLSEN, 2017, p.65 - 68).

Process coding was used to “identify forms of participant action, reaction, and interaction and describes in realistic or conceptual terms what participants are doing or what is happening, within the experiences” (Saldaña, 2018, p. 126). Several respondents stated that there was a need for making curriculum inclusive for all students regardless of gender, sexual orientation, race, or religion. One respondent stated, “By treating all students as cisgender and straight by default, transgender and gender non-conforming students are being made to feel like outsiders among their peers.” Another respondent said,

Humanities classes should provide a backdrop of LGBTQ history. This would provide a meaningful timeline of all social struggles in American history. LGBTQ inclusion would

encourage future generations with an opportunity to appreciate the rights we have, along with the rights we still fight for.

A respondent from New Hampshire said, “LGBTQ history should be in our textbooks because they made a major impact on the world.”

In May 2018, the New York State senate passed Bill 8676, which will go into effect on July 1, 2019. Bill 8676 states that:

Curriculum will be established for school districts in the historical treatment of LGBTQ individuals. The content may vary and shall be age appropriate to provide information, skills and understanding of the historical treatment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender non-conforming individuals.

In January of 2019, Governor Murphy of New Jersey signed legislation making New Jersey the second state in the United States, after California, to require schools to teach disability and LGBTQ inclusive curriculum. New Jersey Senate Bill 1569, proposed in December of 2018, that “boards of education to include instruction, and adopt instructional materials, that accurately portray political, economic, and social contributions of persons with disabilities and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people” (NJ 1569). California’s Fair, Accurate, Inclusive and Respectful Education (FAIR) Act, which took effect on January 1, 2012, provides for culturally diverse curriculum for all students in California.

California, New York and New Jersey are the only states in the United States that have laws that require the teaching of culturally diverse curriculum for all students. Participants in this study spoke to the need of inclusive curriculum and their feelings of not being represented in school curriculum.

Values coding was used because it reflects the “the importance people attribute to themselves, other people, things, or ideas, and principle, moral codes and situational norms people live by” (Saldana, 2018, p. 128). The questionnaire reflected the intrapersonal and interpersonal relationship that the respondents had with and within their high schools. One respondent from New York stated that schools should “hire staff who reflect the diversity in the school, community and the nation.” Another respondent stated that “staff was disrespectful and condescending.” Participants also voiced concerns about safety. A gender non-conforming respondent from New Jersey stated that “bullying was hidden from teachers and staff by the bullies.” A transgender respondent from California said, “I did not feel safe in high school to be out,” and a respondent from Utah said that “few students had the courage to come out.”

Table 2 illustrates the questions asked on the survey and some of the responses from participants. Most of the responses highlight the concerns for safety, the need for an inclusive curriculum and the need for school policies to protect transgender and gender non-conforming individuals.

Table 2

Responses to Questionnaires

Questionnaire	Responses
Q6. Do you feel your high school responded swiftly and fairly to incidents of discrimination, harassment, or bullying?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No, I did not feel safe to be out. • No, they did not respond to incidents of discrimination, harassment, and bullying. • School buried issues. • Resource officer absolutely did. • Most bullying was hidden from the staff. • My high school was dismissive of my experiences.
Q7. Do you feel the faculty and staff in your high school honored and respected students' gender identity, expression, and pronoun preference?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You had to conform. • Some teachers did honor and respect students' identity and preferred pronouns but were threatened by administration for having done so. • Some staff were encouraging and respectful and others were disrespectful and condescending. • Few students had the courage to come out. • Some did and some didn't. Sadly, some of the teachers in my high school had no separation between • students and their own personal feelings. • Some teachers just did not like LGBTQ students.
Q8. Do you feel transgender and gender non-conforming students in your high school experienced discrimination in their dealings with high school administration, faculty, and staff? Please be specific.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oppression and discrimination made it difficult for transgender and gender non-conforming people to be out. • Students did experience discrimination in dealing with administration, faculty, and staff.
Q9. Do you feel that the curriculum in your high school was inclusive to the needs of ALL students?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGBTQ history should be included in the history curriculum. • History. • Hire staff who are reflective of the diversity in the schools and the nation. • Curriculum should be more inclusive; by treating every child as cisgender and straight by default, LGBTQ kids are being made to feel like outsiders among their peers. • There is a need for a more inclusive curriculum in many subjects.
Q10. What do you think school can do to become more inclusive?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools should reach out to queer kids, enlist local agencies, and read research • Engage with LGBTQ clubs. Give to LGBTQ students counselors who are accepting or are LGBTQ themselves. • Schools should include material on LGBTQ health/sex education, history and provide sensitivity training and workshops for teachers.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools must take a stance against the hateful anti-transgender proposals from the government. • Listen to the kids and their families as well as the families of others. • Educate the staff. Have at least one counselor who is particularly and specifically trained to work with transgender and gender non-conforming students. Train faculty as a way to increase understanding and sensitivity.
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Through the process of analyzing the questionnaires, twenty-four statements were identified as being significant to the study. The twenty-four statements were reviewed to interpret their meaning through the context of the research questions. The questionnaires were coded, applying several different coding methods during the initial coding of the questionnaires: in vivo coding, process coding and value coding (Saldaña, 2013, 2018). Each method provided a different lens through which to view the questionnaire data.

The first cycle data analysis included identification of sixty in vivo codes. These codes captured the essence of the participants' high school experiences, emotions, values, or actions in the participants' own voices (Saldaña & Miles, 2013). In vivo coding can be important when seeking to understand the experiences of marginalized individuals (Saldaña, 2013). The in vivo codes revealed that transgender and gender non-conforming individuals knew at a young age that they did not identify with their birth gender. One respondent stated that he did not feel safe in school, and participants echoed that theme multiple times.

Process coding uses "gerunds ("ing" words) as codes" (Saldaña, 2018, p. 126). This approach was used to identify action, reaction, and interaction. The action, reaction, and interactions noted by respondents showed that transgender and gender non-conforming individuals had a difficult time while attending school.

Table 3

Process Codes

Expanding	Disrespecting
Changing	Condescending
Communicating	Treating
Including	Fearing
Researching	Bullying
Making	Lying
Educating	Discriminating
Encouraging	Threatening
Punishing	Protecting
Enforcing	Burying
Conforming	Dismissing
Respecting	Oppressing
	Responding

Value coding provided the researcher with a view of the respondent's values, attitudes, and beliefs. The respondents seemed to be looking for encouragement, respect, and care. I used two second coding methods based on Saldaña (2013): focused coding, to find the frequency of codes, and pattern coding, to find relationships and patterns. Second cycle coding captured the respondents' experiences and shed light on their perceptions of their schools, teachers, and administrators. The responses to the questionnaire formed the codes (shown in Table 4). Response frequency was updated with each new cycle of coding and cross referenced as themes emerged. The codes that continually arose were organized into three themes: curriculum, interpersonal relationships, bullying policies.

Table 4

Code Reduction that Helped Define Themes

Code Reduction from Questionnaires		
Safety Fear Disrespect Condescending Personal beliefs Tolerance	Communication Education Respect Responsibility Policies punishment	Discrimination Threatened Speak Encouragement Diversity Unfair

Questionnaire Themes

The literature suggests that transgender and gender non-conforming youth face many difficulties in school. Transgender and gender non-conforming youth report higher levels of harassment from having their sexuality questioned as well as verbal and physical abuse (D’Augelli et al., 2002, 2006; Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006). The abuse comes from school staff and peers, and there is a need for positive connections to adults at school (McGuire, 2010).

Theme: Interpersonal Relationships

The relationships between transgender and gender nonconforming youth who engage with teachers, staff, and administrators can be positive or negative, and schools need to develop policies for the protection of transgender and gender non-conforming students. According to Leitão and Waugh (2007), “positive teacher-student relationships are characterized by mutual acceptance, understanding, warmth, closeness, trust, respect, care and cooperation” (p. 3). A respondent who identified as an ally said that schools should “have at least one guidance counselor who is trained to work with LGBTQ students.” Another respondent said that schools should “train faculty as a way to increase understanding and sensitivity.”

These responses speak to the idea of building interpersonal relationships between teachers, counselors, and students. Dewey (1938) stated that educators need to be able to discern which attitudes are conducive to continued growth and which are detrimental and then use that relational knowledge to build worthwhile educational experiences for students.

The impact of student-teacher relationships is important for marginalized students. Dewey found that “students need teachers to build strong interpersonal relationships with them, focusing on strengths of the students while maintaining high and realistic expectations for success” (p. 57). Another respondent stated that some teachers may need sensitivity training to learn how to speak to marginalized students “train faculty as a way to increase understanding and sensitivity.” Teachers matter in the lives of all students. According to John Dewey, “all human experience is ultimately social: that it involves contact and communication” (p. 38).

Theme: Curriculum

Darling-Hammond (2006) explained that

teaching is in the service of students, which creates the expectation that teachers will be able to come to understand how students learn and what students need if they are to learn effectively – and that they will incorporate that into their teaching. (p. 4)

Curriculum needs to reflect the needs of the students. One respondent to the questionnaire stated that LGBTQ issues and history are part of the fabric of our society and should be part of the curriculum. A respondent from New Hampshire stated that material and information on LGBTQ health and sexuality should be included in health classes.

Theme: Bullying Policies

The questionnaire asked if the high schools the participants attended dealt swiftly and fairly with incidents of bullying and harassment. A respondent from New Hampshire stated that their high school administration did not act fairly. Another respondent said that when bullying occurred in his school, his school was dismissive of his experiences. Dewey wrote that “teachers are the agents through which knowledge and skills are communicated and rules of conduct enforced” (p. 18). Teachers have a duty to “utilize the surroundings, physical and social, so as to extract from them all that they have to contribute” (p. 40).

Interview Participants

Interview participants yielded from several states including Utah, New York and New Jersey. The participants from New York came from New York City, upstate New York, and Long Island. There was a total of six participants; five participants provided interviews and four of the participants provided photographs. The data that evolved was taken from sixteen interviews that generating nine hours of transcripts. Some of the participants only wanted to be interviewed once. The participants who took photographs had two or more interviews.

Elsa

Elsa is nineteen years old. She did not reveal how she identifies. She did divulge that she was bisexual. She attended a suburban high school in the northeast. She had been dealing with depression since middle school and had been hospitalized several times during high school. She graduated from high school early because of numerous issues. She is attending a local community college.

Eugene

Eugene is twenty-years old. He is a transgender male. He began his transition during his junior year by wearing boys clothing and cutting his hair. He began his medical transition with testosterone as a senior in high school. He had top surgery after graduation. Top surgery is a gender affirming procedure for transgender men and non-binary individuals that creates a masculine chest. He took time off after high school to work. During that time, he had been hospitalized several times for an eating disorder that started during his senior year. Eugene attended a suburban high school in the northeast. He waited a year before enrolling at a local community college.

Flynn

Flynn is thirty years old, he is a transgender male. He began his transition in high school by wearing masculine clothes. He played on the girls' soccer team in high school. He suffered from depression and began cutting classes in middle school, which continued into college. Flynn went to high school in the eastern part of the United States. He was an athlete and was enrolled in a dual enrollment program with a local college his during his senior year. He had a very loving and supportive mother.

Kristoff

Kristoff is a twenty-three-year-old transgender male. He had recently started his medical transition. He suffered from depression from a young age and continues to struggle today. Kristoff went to high school on the east coast. He said he knew in middle school that he liked girls.

Merida

Merida is gender non-conforming. They are twenty-two years old and went to high school in Utah. They are currently in their last semester of college. Pronouns they/them.

Eric

Eric is a twenty-three-year-old transgender male. He went to a small private christian high school on the east coast. He did not start his transition until he was in college because he feared family rejection.

Interview Findings

The interviews allowed for the opportunity to speak with young adults who were willing to share their high school experiences. Due to the extremely sensitive nature of the topic and the small population size, the information about the participants was compiled to be as broad as possible to allow for anonymity while still allowing their experiences to be detailed. Using information from the demographic survey only five individuals agreed to take/share photographs and be interviewed. One participant only provided photographs; they did not want to be interviewed. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to ensure anonymity. The participant's pseudonyms are Flynn, Kristoff, Elsa, Merida, Eric, and Eugene. The participants ranged in age from nineteen to thirty. Interviews were conducted based on the location of each participant. Several interviews were conducted via phone, one was conducted in a hotel conference room in New Jersey, and two were conducted at a local library. All interviews were recorded using an Echo Live scribe pen. Each participant was confident speaking about their experiences, and they were honest and forthcoming. Before the start of the interview, participants were asked if they had any questions about their participation in the study. Consent forms were collected in person before the interviews or were emailed for the participants doing

phone interviews. The interview protocol provided a rich depiction of the lived high school experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. When the interviews were finished, recordings were extracted and sent to the transcriptionist. Upon return a copy was forwarded to me and I provided a copy to participants to review for additions and/or corrections. Careful analysis of the interview transcripts allowed for the identity of emotion and word patterns that would illuminate the emergent themes. Having the interviews transcribed verbatim, allowed for the researcher to read each transcript several times as well as listen to the interviews.

Being engaged with the data in a meaningful way required deliberate effort. Saldaña (2013, 2018) presents in-depth coding processes used in qualitative research. These manuals served as tools in planning analysis of the data collected. Initial coding of interviews included in vivo coding, emotion coding, value coding, and narrative coding (Saldaña, 2013, 2018). Each method provided a different lens through which to view the data.

First cycle data analysis included the identification of sixty-seven in vivo codes. These codes captured the true essence of the participants' high school experiences, emotion, value or action in the participant's voice (Saldaña & Miles, 2013). In vivo coding can be important when seeking to understand the experiences of marginalized individuals (Saldana, 2013). The in vivo codes revealed that transgender and gender non-conforming individuals knew at a young age that they did not identify with their birth gender. Flynn said, "I felt wrong, like the puzzle pieces did not fit. I felt different, like I guess I want to say the word 'freak' because I had these feelings that I didn't think anyone else had." Eugene stated that he "felt super uncomfortable, extremely uncomfortable, like always trying to, you know, cover myself up and not really be seen, not really be paid attention to in that way."

Emotion coding brought the researcher back to the analytical memorandums taken during the interview process. The analytical memorandums were reviewed, the researcher was looking for expressions, emotions, sentiments, and reactions that took place during the interviews. Value coding provided a view of the participants' values, attitudes, and beliefs. Merida expressed how their religion played a role in how schools taught historical content. They provided an anecdote about how the AP U.S. History exam included a question about the Stonewall Riots. They recalled learning about several civil rights events, but they had never heard about the Stonewall Riots. When they asked the teacher, he said he was not allowed to teach about it. There are seven states in the United States that are "No promo homo" states. No promo homo are laws in states that limit or prohibit the mention or discussion of homosexuality and transgender identity in public schools. (GLSEN, 2018) Merida lived in a state where there were No Promo Homo laws, so their A.P. U.S. History teacher was correct when he said he was not allowed to teach about the Stonewall Riots. Narrative coding enabled the researcher to review and look back on the interviews for each participant's story to fully capture the essence of their individual experiences and the experiences of the participants. The researcher used two second coding methods based on Saldaña's (2013) recommendations: (a) focus coding to find the frequency of codes and (b) pattern coding to find relationships and patterns. Second cycle coding captured the participants' experiences and shed light on their perceptions of teachers and administrators.

Interview Data

Ninety-five words, phrases, or statements were identified that held significance to the study. Continued analysis of participant statements led to the emergence of several themes. Each of the emergent themes resulted in a number of supporting sub-themes. Since the interviews were personal, honest, and emotional, the themes that emerged represented the

essence of the lived experiences of these transgender and gender non-conforming youth. The four themes and eleven sub-themes tell stories of identity, struggles with mental illness, social and emotional trauma, and more. Most of the participants interviewed talked about transphobia and how they experienced it in the classroom and in their schools. According to Planned Parenthood (2017), “transphobia is the fear, hatred, disbelief, or mistrust of people who are transgender, thought to be transgender, or whose gender expression doesn’t conform to traditional gender roles.” Transphobia take on different forms, including fear, misunderstanding, discounting preferred pronouns or gender identity, derogatory language and name-calling, bullying, abuse and violence. (Planned Parenthood) Participants also shared when they first knew they were in the wrong body or that they weren’t the “right kind of woman.” Some of the participants spoke about having supportive parents and others said that their parents were not supportive. They also spoke about their experience of coming out to either parents or school personal. Kristoff stated that “I knew I liked girls in middle school.” Eric said he knew he was transgender in high school, but he could not come out because of his family. He spoke about how it would have been difficult to come out in high school because he attended a small Christian high school.

Themes

The individuals interviewed were very candid and honest; they provided a deep and emotional account of the trauma they encountered at the hands of administrators, faculty, staff, and peers. Trauma can be understood as “a blow to the tissues of the body – or more frequently now, to the tissues of the mind that results in injury or some other disturbance” (Erikson, 1995, p. 183). Trauma can manifest across different experiences, including experiences that are physical, psychological, relational, spiritual, and cultural (Brown, 2008;

Erikson, 1995; Levers, 2012). The themes that emerged were Somewhere Only We Know, Mind Body and Soul and Mirror, each theme had one or more sub themes.

Theme: Somewhere Only We Know

Participants all spoke about the need for safe places where they could be “themselves”, without fear of harassment or violence. Bathrooms and locker rooms were areas of concern for participants.

Sub theme: Bathrooms.

For a cisgender individual, a bathroom. For a transgender or gender non-conforming individual, it is much more. As the researcher spoke with participants, the topic of bathrooms came up multiple times. According to Terry Kogan, the laws surrounding sex separation of bathroom facilities “were rooted in the ‘separate spheres’ ideology of the early nineteenth century that considered a woman's proper place to be in the home, tending the hearth fire, and rearing children” (Kogan, 2007, p. 5). Today, it is widely assumed that there should be separate bathrooms for men and woman, but these strict standard hurts transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. According to the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, 59% of survey respondents avoided using public restrooms because they feared violence, confrontations, or other problems. Nearly 32% of survey respondents stated that they limit what they eat and drink to avoid using public restrooms. Respondents to the 2015 U.S Transgender Survey also reported being verbally harassed, physically attacked, or sexually assaulted when using a public restroom (James, 2016). For transgender and gender non-conforming students, bathrooms and locker rooms are a big deal.

Flynn shared,

I got kicked out of multiple bathrooms even before I transitioned because I presented very masculine. So, I did not want to have that conversation with people. I didn't know how to have a conversation with people. So, I would find a safe bathroom . . . um, it is hard to explain what safe means because, you know, while I was transitioning it was harder. I would always go to the bathroom at inconvenient times specially so that I didn't have to interact with people because often when I did, they'd be like, you're in the wrong bathroom and I would just leave because I didn't really know how to have that conversation with people.

Flynn added that when he was younger and gender non-conforming,

I was a girl who was just really masculine. I got questioned from the girls all the time and I think the girl's room is a little bit more of a sensitive subject. You know, I never even as a girl got questioned in the guy's bathroom. I think a lot of the conversation about bathrooms is an unrealistic fear. The fact that we have separate bathrooms is unrealistic fear. Um, but for trans people, bathrooms symbolize access. For trans people, gender-neutral bathrooms in the world means the ability to attend school in a safe spot or to go to the doctor or go to a restaurant or a hotel without being attacked. For trans people, bathrooms symbolize access.

Freak

This was in Ripley's Believe it or Not in NYC. This is {I assume} the men's room. I just felt so different. Like a freak. I didn't want to be so different. I just wanted to fly under the radar, and I couldn't.



Figure 11. Flynn, “Freak.”

Elsa brought up bathrooms as well. She was discussing how schools try to make changes but do not actually put “the things we need in place.” She proceeded to tell a story about how the GSA club at her school asked for a gender-neutral bathroom so that students did not have to go to the nurse’s office. After months of fighting, the district gave the students a gender-neutral bathroom. Elsa said,

We got a gender-neutral bathroom and it was closed the whole year. Um, and that was like, that was the biggest step for us. It was like, even though we earned that, and we got that, it was like nothing happened after that. I can’t imagine it being super difficult to handle all of these problems and just make a school accepting and open to those things. You can support the LGBTQ community without making this a huge deal.

Eugene, who was the president of his high school's LGBTQ Club, discussed at length what a gender-neutral bathroom meant to him and the other LGBTQ students in his school. He also discussed the negative reaction he received from faculty and staff:

the first thing we focused on was getting a gender-neutral bathroom—we had to aim pretty low. Um, it seems like it was a huge accomplishment, but it was really an illusionary accomplishment because we were told we were going to get a new bathroom. But what they did was they actually took a faculty restroom, um and changed it into a gender-neutral bathroom. The issue with this was that teachers were complaining about it. Um, I actually heard about it. Teachers were telling me that, like, it wasn't fair that their bathroom was taken away even though they had multiple bathrooms. Um, so that was like the backlash from that. Then there was the fact that it was completely isolated. It was in the most isolated place it could possibly have been. It was like downstairs all the way to a door, you know, away from everything. And, most importantly, it was locked all the time. You rarely would you be able to just go in, so you would have to find a custodian and then they would open it for you, which is essentially like outing someone and it made it more dangerous. And I had no other choice, so I had to do that.

No Place

January, 2016

After vehement persuasion, my high school provided the bare minimum. They changed a faculty restroom-located in a remote corner of the hallway- to a gender neutral one. It was rarely unlocked which meant a student had to seek out custodians to open it which made me feel more isolation, displacement, and embarrassment. However, this was my only option after I was told I'd get in trouble for using the boys or girls bathroom which was aggressively enforced by the aids guarding it.



Figure 12. Eugene, “No Place”

I asked Eugene if he ran into any opposition trying to get the bathroom. He replied, Yeah. Um, I mean this was a conversation since September. We got the bathroom in January. The opposition was, of course, um, you know, like making the actual bathroom was a complication and the backlash from other people was a complication. I was told that it would stir up a controversy that, um, parents would not feel safe, uh, that students would not feel safe, even though it was a single stall bathroom. But the issue was that I was told I wasn't allowed to use any of the bathrooms. So, this was the only thing, the only option I had. So not only was I trying to get this for future classes, but I had nowhere to go to the bathroom, I would be getting in trouble because it wasn't allowed.



It is Just a
Bathroom

Figure 13. Elsa, “It is just a bathroom.”

Sub theme: Locker rooms. Locker rooms were another issue that came up in some of the interviews. Souza (2005) reported that transgender high school students in her study expressed concerns specific to bathrooms and locker room: “Trans youth were afraid of harassment and violence from peers and school staff, especially when using bathrooms and locker rooms” (p. 15-28). Her participants suggested that schools create gender-neutral bathrooms and develop and implement zero tolerance policies that explicitly state that harassment of or violence towards any person who does not conform to gender stereotypes or who is gender variant will be punished.

Eugene discussed how there was no place for him to change for gym other than a closet in a classroom:

I was given one choice and that was to change in the photography room closet. So, that is where I changed. Yeah. And the uncomfortable part was that there was a class in the

classroom. So, when I was changing, there were thirty kids right outside of the closet.

They could see that I was changing into gym clothes and then changing back out. Yeah.

The school had no other option for me. I was not allowed to use the locker rooms. That wasn't an option.

Flynn talked about being an athlete and noted that if he had changed his name legally in high school, he would not have been allowed to participate in sports. Even though he was legally a female and was allowed to play on the girls' soccer team, he faced transphobia and fear

When I started transitioning, I was on the girls' soccer team. I got picked on. It happened through most of my experience where I had to interact with certain people. I was worried about bathrooms and locker rooms and things, and I avoided them at all costs.

Theme: Mind, Body, and Soul

Discrimination in federal state and local legislation can be a contributing factor to mental illness in the LGBTQ community. Several studies have examined the correlation between homophobic name-calling and mental illness. Collier, Bos, and Sandfort (2013) studied the impact of homophobic name calling on mental illness in secondary school students. They noted that while there is a negative impact of homophobic name calling on mental illness, there is a lack of understanding of its relationship to mental illness in adolescents. International and U.S. studies have concluded that LGBTQ youth report higher rates of emotional distress, mood and anxiety disorders, self-harm, suicidal ideation, and suicidal behavior compared to heterosexual young adults of the same age (Eskin et al., 2005; Fergusson et al., 2005; Fleming et al., 2007; Marshal et al., 2011). Further, mental health is a predictor of other destructive behaviors such as substance use, abuse, and dependence (Marshal et al., 2008). In a meta-analysis, Marshal

et al. (2011) reported that LGBTQ youth were almost three times more likely than their cisgender peers to report suicidal ideation and depression. These investigators also noted a slight difference in depressive symptoms compared to cisgender youth.

Sub theme: Self-harm

Non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) is the intentional injury of one's body tissue without suicidal intent. Examples of non-suicidal self-injury include cutting, burning, and hitting oneself (Claes & Vandereycken, 2007). Several participants spoke about their struggle with non-suicidal self-injury.

Flynn

Flynn addressed the issue of self-harm and the impact it had on him in high school:

I am in high school and I am cutting, and it is severe. It's getting worse and worse, but I am able to hide it through various forms of clothing and stuff like that. So, I am wearing bracelets up my arms and stuff like that. The students know of course. I'm interacting with other cutters and we talk about ways to hide cutting. Everyone knows we're all aware. Um, the gym teachers don't let those, those bands in the gym, though, so like all the bandages, band aids, and all the things I use to, like, cover and to keep those wounds clean, they are very visible to the teachers there, but they never said a word. Um, I had gotten caught by the history teacher that year. He had overheard me talking about it, and he, he never said anything. I don't even remember this. In fact, I found out about it later on, mostly because when I went to the hospital (because there was a short time where I was in the hospital) . . . when I went to the hospital, my mom and dad tore apart my room. They were convinced I was doing drugs or . . . I mean, I had smoked weed, but they thought I was doing something stronger, you know, like there had to be a reason

why this had happened. So, they tore apart my room, like searching, like, like they had a warrant and they were looking for the smoking gun so to speak. So, they're searching through and that involves reading through my journal. So, she read through and she found a section in which I talked about the history teacher being aware of my cutting, whether I talked about it in front of him or he had seen it and I was concerned about it, but he was aware and never called my mom. I was a danger to myself and no one ever stepped up even though multiple teachers were aware that it was happening.

Um, I can say now, in retrospect, part of my gender and sexuality played a huge role into whether or not I was cutting because I used to cut as a kind of as a call for help because I knew something was wrong. I was doing it as a punishment to myself for feeling this way because it felt like it was wrong. There was some internalized homophobia and transphobia that I had. I didn't want to be different. I didn't want to be a freak. I didn't want to be any of those things. If I could have beat it out of myself, I would have. I would have ended up killing myself. That would have been the only real option if it kept going.

Queer punishment

This was at my house. I was a cutter from middle school till I was in college. It was only in retrospect that I was able to realize that it was partly a cry for help/something is wrong and partly a punishment for being that way I am. I didn't want to kill myself- yet- I did not think it was okay I had these feelings so a punishment was necessary. Internalize gay/transphobia.

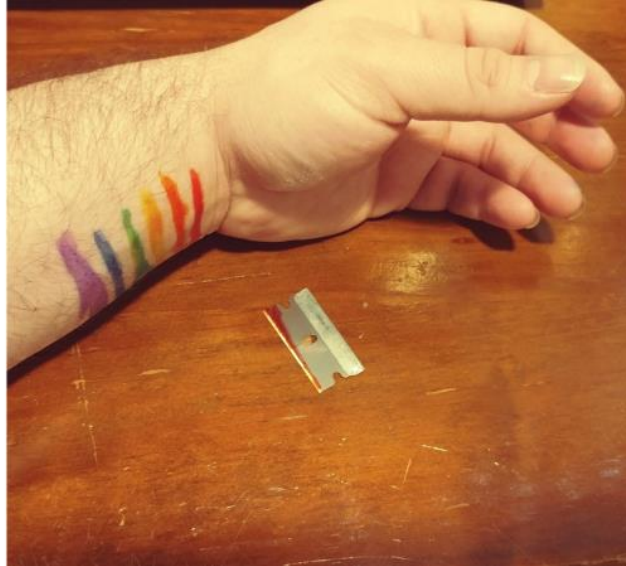


Figure 14. Flynn, “Queer Punishment.”

Sub theme: Suicidal ideation.

The 2015 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey data showed that LGBTQ students are at substantial risk for suicide, with forty percent of LGBTQ students in their study saying that they had seriously considered suicide, and twenty-nine percent reporting having attempted suicide in the last twelve months. Flynn discussed very openly his thoughts of suicide and how his mother was able to stop him.

Once you recognize that this isn't working, the only options really available is you're going to kill yourself or you're going to change. Those are the only choices available to you. You're going to deal with what consequences that come with killing yourself. It's just a realization that none of your dreams or wants will ever come to fruition. Can you live or not live with that?

Which Beam

This is in my attic. When I was 16 this is where I planned to kill myself. I practiced tying a noose, and I planned my goodbye. My mom figured it out and I went to the hospital. She was just flabbergasted I knew exactly which beam I was going to hang myself from.



Figure 15. Flynn,” Which Beam.”

Sub theme: Trying to take care of me.

Self-care occurs when individuals try to take care of themselves physically and emotionally. For transgender and gender non-conforming individuals, it can mean trying to navigate doctors. It can also mean a negative body image. The participants in this study reflected on navigating the world and trying to deal with depression, anorexia, and other mental illness.

Kristoff revealed,

I’m pretty sure everyone in my family knows how crappy my mental health was growing up. I was an angry kid because I didn’t know how to properly explain what I was going through and to be honest, it took its toll on the whole family. Schools need to remember small people can still feel big things.

A speed bump can feel like a mountain until you climb over it, right?

"Mental health is so very important. And I'm thankful to the people that genuinely check in on me, the people who don't act like all I am is a transition. Everything is not okay all of the time. Everything is temporary & that's the beauty of life. A speed bump can feel like a mountain until you climb over it, right?"



Figure 16. Kristoff, "A speed bump can Feel Like a Mountain Until you Climb over It, Right?"

In the words of Flynn,

Through most of high school, like from the time I got my period from puberty, pretty much on, it was kind of a downward spiral, and it just got progressively worse to where by the time I was like a junior or senior, I just assumed that this was how my life was going to be. I was always going to feel sad until either I die of natural causes or I kill myself.

Clocked

"This was in the PA Magic Garden. As a trans person there is always a fear people will be able to pick you out as being trans. They will catch a mannerism, your voice, the angle of you face, your height, whatever and say that's a Trans person!"



Figure 17. Flynn, "Clocked"

Eugene shared, "Because of all the shame I had gone through at school I was starting to develop an eating disorder. I was unhealthy physically and mentally." In the words of Kristoff, "It's been ten months and I feel like I need to be honest. When people ask me, 'How are you doing?'" or how I'm feeling, 95% of the time I lie. For a little while now, I've not been doing okay. I'm pretty depressed, to the point where I rarely talk to anyone or leave my apartment. And the past couple weeks, I've been letting it consume me. The fact is, it's easier to tell everyone you're okay, and half the time even if you said you weren't—no one would know what to say to that. But I'm working on it. This past week, in particular, has had some really low lows and high highs. And it's hard to balance when you're also trying to balance hormones and stares and people saying offensive things. Then there's the normal shit—my cat being sick, being so far from friends and family. It's been ten months and I feel like I need to be honest.

Friday Night

“When I draw up on Friday, I have use the bigger needle to draw up the testosterone because it’s so thick. Then I use the smaller needle to actually inject. I grow hair EVERYWHERE.”

Testosterone is considered a controlled substance so it can be a pain in the butt to get.



Figure 18. Kristoff, “Friday Night.”

Elsa talked about returning to school after being in the hospital for depression:

There was never trust there between any staff that I went to about being mentally ill. It was always just like, I’m too scared to be honest and to be open and blunt about how I’ve been feeling. Um, because it’s still, it’s not normalized, and it’s not talked about. So, everyone hears suicide or like I need help. I have been through mental illness, I have been in the hospital, I am on medication for depression.

Merida talked about the reality of being traumatized by being gender non-conforming.

Sub theme: A piece is missing.

Participants stated that they knew at a young age that they were different. Merida stated, “God played a cruel joke on me. I knew I was not a typical girl; I was somehow different.”



Figure 19. “God Played a Cruel Joke.”

Flynn discussed a lack of self-esteem because he was in the wrong body: I had real bad self-esteem because something is not quite the way it should be. I do not have a dick. I know, as a guy who literally does not have one, recognizing that no matter what you do, you are not going to have a biological penis. It is the argument that everyone uses to try to dissuade my identity: well, you don’t have a penis. I am aware of that. That sucks. But I don’t think that makes me more or less a guy. It was a really hard thing to come to terms with.”

Feeling Whole

This is my first feeldoe- a type of internal dildo. I had my first strap on in high school. And wearing it was the first time my body felt whole.



Figure 20. Flynn, Feeling Whole

Theme: Mirror

What do you see when you look in the mirror? Imagine looking in the mirror and knowing that the image you see in front of you does not match how you feel. This is the reality for transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. The stories that my participants shared echoed this repeatedly. Shame, tomboy, masculine, freak, and miserable were terms that all of the participants repeated.

Kristoff stated,

I want to hide because I hate my body and I hate that people stare and fumble words because they don't know what to say when they don't even have to say anything at all. It's funny how people try to overcompensate like that. It makes making new friends difficult. I'm hard on myself. I feel so uncomfortable constantly. I feel like it's my fault. Some days (like today), it takes me three tries to get the needle in my leg. But I didn't

ask to be born in the wrong body. I'm doing the best I can. Today, I made an appointment for a consult with one of the best surgeons for top surgery. Also, today I met a really nice pharmacist with a Totoro clip who told me how to talk to the pharmacist and get my scripts without having to use my birth name in public. So, there is good in the bad and bad in the good. Mental health is so very important. I'm thankful to the people that genuinely check in on me, the people who don't act like all I am is a transition. Everything is not okay all of the time. Everything is temporary and that's the beauty of life. A speed bump can feel like a mountain until you climb over it, right?

CONSTANTLY

"I feel so uncomfortable
CONSTANTLY and I feel like
it's my fault. But I didn't ask
to be born in the wrong body
and I'm doing the best I can."



Figure 21. Kristoff, "CONSTANTLY."

Sub Theme: Who are you?

Participants also spoke about trying to find themselves and the role teachers played in that process. Participants agreed that administrators, faculty, and staff should have training if they are unsure of how to work with transgender and gender non-conforming students, but they also said that some teachers and school support personnel do not know what to do. Eugene told the following story about a music teacher he had:

I took music history. It was a good class. He talked about different musicians like Freddy Mercury. He acknowledged that fact that Freddy Mercury had this identity that other people defined for him. He mentioned that he was bisexual; he was not gay. He went on to explain how a lot of people treated it like a scandal and how, for many, it defined his existence. One day, the music teacher was going to show a video where Freddy Mercury was dressed in drag. He came up to me before class and asked if I was cool with him showing the video. He also said he did not want to single me out and he did not want me to feel uncomfortable. He also told me he would shut down the class discussion if it got out of hand. I will never forget this because he went out of his way to make sure I was ok. He was so respectful of who I was.

Eugene also spoke about his identity and how it related to school climate:

So, when I was around the age of fourteen, it was definitely more of a suppressed feeling about identity. It was so evident to me that I had that sense of dissonance because being a female was so significant in school. Like it would, you know, be so evident the way that, like, teachers treated girls, you know, the way boys treat girls. It was so obvious that I was seen as a female in society and there was nothing, I could do about it. I was

super uncomfortable, like always trying to, you know, cover myself up and not really be seen, not really be paid attention to in that way.



Fed Up

June, 2015

After months of feeling estranged from my actual identity, I knew I had to do something to alleviate that disconnection so I chopped all my hair off. Regardless of the cut initially being feminine, I felt a sense of liberation I hadn't had since I was a child. I felt like a boy and I absolutely loved it.

Figure 22. Eugene, “Fed Up”

I asked Eugene to provide an example. He told a story about being in history class where the class was discussing the Trump/Clinton election. There were many sexist comments made and the teacher did nothing. Eugene also spoke about when he completed all the official legal paperwork, he had no help or guidance from any one at school, so he went to his guidance counselor to have his name changed officially in the school’s computer system. The counselor offered no comfort in this process, and all of his teachers were notified the first day of school. He thought this was a good thing:

I thought that my teachers would have a sense of awareness and acknowledge me as a boy. But what I did not realize is that they didn’t have to acknowledge me as a boy. They were told I was a boy, but it was not enforced. Teachers were not

accepting. There were two teachers in particular. One was unresponsive and was like *I will try my best but I'm probably going to mess up* even though I was presenting as a boy (she did not know me prior). The other teacher did not know me prior, but she found out my name and called me it in front of the entire class and she would always use me as an example on purpose. Then she would laugh and be like, "Oh, I'm sorry." We got to a point that I had to talk to her. I asked her not to use me as examples during her lessons. She threatened to dock my participation grade. It was getting to the point where she was purposely putting emphasis on my existence. It got to a point where someone in my class even said: "Isn't that a dude?" I decided to go to the principal. I explained what was going on and he said there was no way that she could do that she is such a sweet woman. He never spoke to her and it continued.

Flynn shared,

A teacher overheard me curse out another student because he was bullying me. I got detention for this. While I was serving detention, the teacher calls me over and says, "For the future, you need to stand up to those kids." After speaking to the teacher, it became very apparent that the teacher was aware that I was being bullied and she did not step in. I did not say anything to the teacher. I just wanted to get home. It was something that stuck with me. I think teachers also get afraid of getting involved.

Flynn talked about returning to school after being hospitalized for cutting.

I returned to school after being in the hospital for cutting, I walked into class and the teacher said, "Do you want to tell everyone why you were in the hospital?" I didn't want

to think about being in the hospital. What I got from most teachers was that if something was going on, they would ignore it.

Elsa shared that, “A science teacher asked us to put down the sex we were born as on our final exam. “No one was shocked by this,” she said. “I felt like I was rebellious and crazy.” Elsa told a story about not standing for the national anthem at the school’s annual pep rally. It was during the time that the NFL players were taking a knee:

I was sitting to bring awareness to the things that were going on in the school. After a few minutes, people started to throw things at me. When the pep rally was over, I left the school and it felt like the whole school was waiting for me. Someone spit at me, as I tried to leave the football team was behind me chasing me and yelling at me to get out of their school (my school). The next day, I was called to the principal’s office. I told them everything and administration did nothing and it got progressively worse. There were tweets and other social media posts. I went to the principal’s office to show them and they still did nothing.

Some of the participants said they felt that school counselors did not know what to do to help transgender and gender non-conforming students. They did not have information that trans students need. For example, Eugene said that he looked to his guidance counselor to help give him information on how to obtain the legal paperwork needed to change his name.

Sub Theme: Invisibility in the health curriculum.

When we spoke about curriculum, the participants all stated that their schools did not have curricula that helped the LGBTQ population. In the words of Elsa,

Health class does not cover anything, I had to go forty minutes away to take a sex ed. class at an LGBTQ center because the one in high school didn't teach anything. It was like you don't have sex. God forbid we mention anything LGBTQ related.

Eugene explained,

There was no information given that would benefit anybody that doesn't fall into the binary or even like heterosexual people. I mean, let alone, like, the lack of information with straight people. There was no talk about gay people and trans people. Trans people were never part of the conversation whatsoever. It was like, if you are male you have a penis and if you are female you have a vagina and that's it. So, it isolates you obviously.

There was no trans or LGBTQ representation in my English classes. I had one teacher that was open about stuff like that and he would go more in depth with diversity within the literature, but it wasn't necessarily with a gender identity.

According to Flynn,

In health class, we talked about cis heteronormative health-based issues. We did not talk about sexuality for LGBTQ people. We talked about girls getting their period and what sex looks like and the risks of sex. But we talked about CIS hetero sex. It was just kind of the absence of any kind of conversation.

Sub Theme: Invisibility in all aspects of school.

Participants also discussed how they felt invisible at school. As Flynn explained,

I would have been happy learning about the likelihood of getting HIV through anal sex. We didn't have that conversation. Teachers could have a conversation about prep for anal sex. I think it is appropriate for the school to have information and brochures about legally changing names or other important information for those students who need that

type of information. It would have been nice to hear about Stonewall or Christine Jorgenson, those tiny instances aren't typically talked about. It would have helped the LGBTQ students like me who don't get to see their life represented all the time. Maybe once in a while.

Flynn spoke about the lack of an inclusive curriculum in high school.

Nothing mirrored back my reality. I think the lack of conversations and support at home in school played a role in my cutting."

People who use your dead name who don't try to be considerate of who you see yourself as or people who like to go out of their way to make sure other people are aware that you're trans or like to go out of their way to not use the correct pronouns. Or teachers who are open about being anti LGBTQ and say things like "I wouldn't want one of those people touching my food with their AIDS." This was brought to the attention of the school, but they needed other students to say they heard it, and no one would step up. I think schools have a responsibility to step in, especially when they see something happening right then and there in front of them. It is their responsibility to create a safe space. If they see something happening, they need to address it.

Sub theme: Respect

Eugene stated,

It should not be a choice for the teacher to respect you; they should have to respect you because there are laws that exist regarding equality and those need to be followed. The fact that teachers were able to embarrass me like that and get away with it, the fact that it was their choice whether they want to respect me or not . . . they knew me as nothing but a boy.

Teachers treated me differently, they went out of their way to treat me differently. I was asked inappropriate questions about bottom surgery and whether I really was a boy.

Photovoice

Maxine Greene (2000) has argued that the concept of voice refers to how individuals identify us and choose our identities in relation to the ideas and principles of freedom, equality, justice, and concern for others. Photovoice empowers participants to share their ideas, concerns, and stories that help them to become “aware of themselves appearing before others, speaking in their own voices . . . to bring into being a common world” (Greene, 2000, p. 68). As part of this study, participants were asked to either take photographs or to share old photographs that reflected their high school experiences. In the first interview, the participants were asked to title and caption their photos. During the second interview the researcher and the participant engaged in a discussion about what their photos meant to them and how the images reflected their high school experiences.

Presented below are the photographic illustrations, captioning, and accompanying narratives obtained through photo elicitation that define and symbolize the high school experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming young adults. Several weeks of the participants searching for and/or taking pictures resulted in their selection of fifteen to twenty-five images each that best represented transgender and gender non-conforming experiences in high school (Appendix L). All images are original and have not been retouched or censored.

The participants talked openly about the assumptions that classmates and teachers make about various aspects of their lives as a trans or gender non-conforming person. They spoke about a responsibility that they felt to “fight” against prejudice and discrimination in the face of

these assumptions in order to feel safe and affirmed in their identities. During the interview process, participants were audibly emotional as they shared the challenges of living “authentically” and loving themselves despite societal expectations and negative messages from faculty, staff, and administrators. The participants recounted emotional stories about their struggles with depression, cutting, and suicidal ideation and about the lack of consideration and care they received from their schools. Teachers and administrators played a major role in these individuals’ lives for better or worse.

Each participant was confident in talking about their experiences and was very honest and forthcoming about their photographs, why they were taken, and what they mean. First cycle data analysis included the identification of eighty-five in vivo codes. These codes captured the essence of the participants’ high school experiences, emotions, values, and actions in their own voices (Saldaña & Miles, 2013). The in vivo codes revealed that transgender and gender non-conforming individuals experience problems with teachers and administrators and with curriculum. Content analysis of the photographs was used to explore the objects, scenes, and people portrayed in the images. The photographs, and captions were analyzed to reveal recurring themes. The content of most of the photos were either of the participant themselves, art pieces or landscapes, the meaning behind the photos dealt with individual identity in school.

Photographs



Figure 23. Kristoff, "Finding yourself is an incredible thing."

Eugene shared a photo entitled "Self-Discovery" (Figure 24). The jacket, he said, was a symbol of my masculinity at the time because I did have a way to actually express it. It was like my way of feeling like a boy within myself, like whether I told people or not. Going to school and being surrounded by boys and girls and the way everyone acts, it was extremely pressuring. School increased the discomfort level that I had because of the emphasis put on who I was and not just from students but from teachers in the classroom.

The transition was discussed at length "the mood that existed in the classroom you couldn't just be you; you could fly under the radar and just exist and learn." Eugene proceeded to talk about the micro-aggressions that teachers expressed. The researcher asked him if he could provide an example,

the hetero normativity aspect of lessons where it wasn't even a concept that someone could be gay. It was like this joke and, you know, all of it was just so out of the realm of what was normal that was emphasized through everything, through lessons and through discourse and through just talking.

Eugene said,

a lot of people perceive it as people want special treatment, but it's actually more like we . . . I, at least . . . did not want emphasis put on me. I wanted to just get my education and not have to deal with that emphasis being put and that embarrassment and that shame.

Self Discovery

November, 2014

When I turned 16, my interests and passions blossomed and began to shape my personality. However, when I looked in the mirror, I had a painfully dissonant perception of myself. Being seen as female solidified that feeling. I told my best friend everyday that I wished I was born a boy and when my brother gave me his jacket, (pictured) I wore it everyday because it was my personal way of expressing masculinity. It made me feel myself.



Figure 24. Eugene, “Self-Discovery.”

Flynn stated that he had a difficult time “feeling comfortable with myself. For no apparent reason that I could ascertain, I was just miserable. I was crying a lot and becoming more and more isolated.” Flynn also discussed the fact that he began engaging in dangerous

behaviors in high school. “I started smoking, drinking, and engaging in promiscuous behavior. I was trying to fill a void because I was so sad.”

Call from the Void

This was taken in a hotel in Maine. Before I knew that I was trans, I felt wrong. Like a puzzle piece that just didn't fit. During that time I didn't make the best decisions (i.e.: drinking, smoking, sex)- It was almost like I was just trying to feel good, but I was making it harder to see the real issue.



Figure 25. Flynn, “Call from the Void.”

Eugene discussed the first time he wore a suit to a school event:

I was just so happy to be in a suit. It felt right. It only felt right within myself because the second I stepped out into the world that was gone, there was none of that because no one saw me as a guy. The event had a lot of people from school and their parents. I was getting a lot of comments on my suit; it diluted my excitement. It is like you can feel any type of way, positive or negative, and other people will take it away merely by existing.

Firsts

June, 2015

My mom took me to buy something to wear for an event and despite her acute disapproval, resistance, and attempt to sway me, I got my first suit. Although I was still closeted, I got to express myself in a way that made me more comfortable. However, people's perceptions of me made it hard to remain in that blissful state.



Figure 26. Eugene, “Firsts.”

Eugene described the experience of legally changing his name as follows:

It was a big deal because I was going through the whole college process with my guidance counselor and even though I wanted to at the time go away to college, I could not do anything without getting my name changed. My name was actually an issue in school. People were debating my existence. It became a debate topic in classrooms. Teachers allowed students to say whatever they wanted about me. It was invasive and disrespectful. Teachers and guidance counselors should be able to give you information or guide you in ways to legally change your name. It was very complicated and confusing. It should not be difficult to have pamphlets. Schools are there to serve all students and serve them with an education. They should also be giving them resources because there is no harm in doing that.



November, 2015

I sprinted through the halls and straight into the courtroom five minutes before they closed. Luckily, the judge granted my name change without even seeing me. After months of paperwork and legal fees, I rejoiced at the sight of my name on paper. Because of it, I didn't have to crumble from anxiety every time I went to a bank, a doctors appointment, or to my job.

Name Change

Figure 27. Eugene, “Name Change.”

Similarly, Flynn discussed navigating his transition in school and out. He talked about the difficulty he encountered with the girls' soccer team, bathroom use issues, and unsupportive teachers.

Sea of Nope

"This was taken at Chips Folly Family Camp Ground. I chose this one because of the feeling. It feels lonely but determined to me. That's what it felt like. Like I was on this journey and even though I had support I was building this bridge alone right through an ocean of doubts and fears and intolerance."



Figure 28. Flynn, "Sea of Nope."

Eugene also spent a lot of time describing how painful and traumatic it was coming out in high school as transgender. He talked about unsupportive teachers and administrators, but he also spoke about the accomplishment he felt after going through the process. He said, "I knew at the time things shouldn't have been the way it was and like no one else did." He added, "If I couldn't fight for myself at the time, I would fight for who would exist in the future."

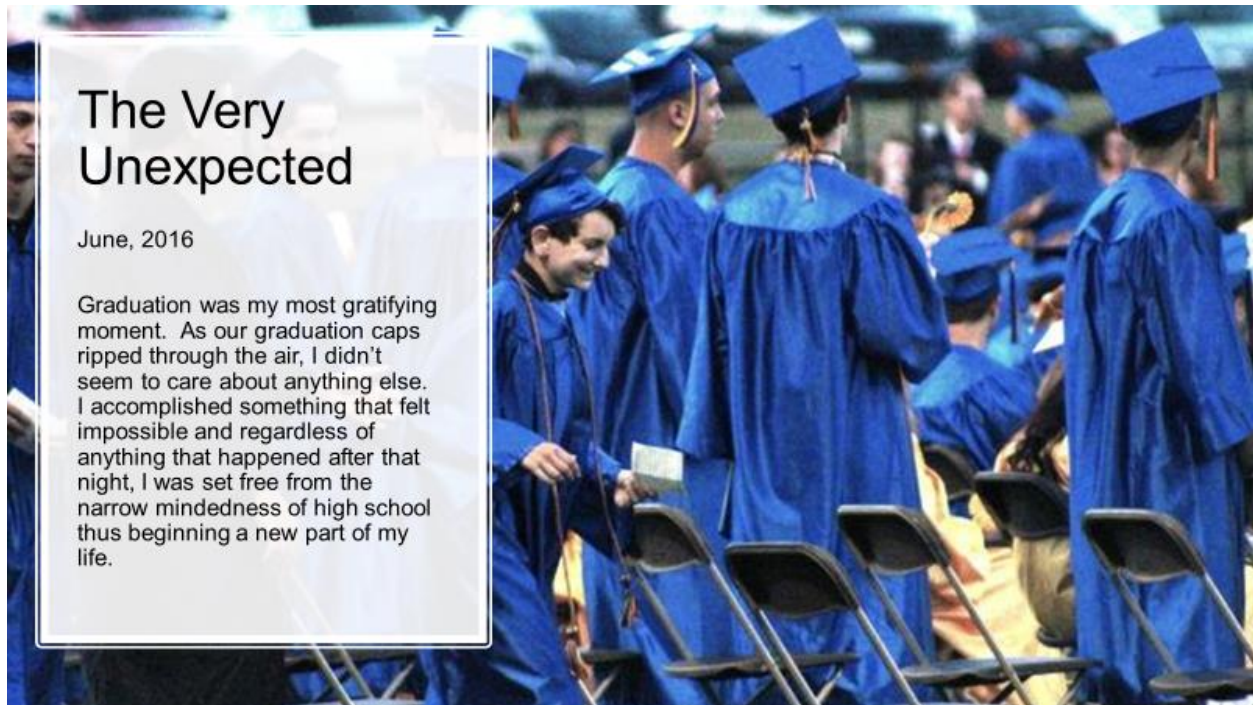


Figure 29. Eugene, The Very Unexpected.”

Elsa spoke about not being listened to: “I posted something on twitter about the election.

Apparently, it riled kids up and was causing chaos. It was causing a disruption.” Her principal to her take down the tweet. Other kids went to the principal and said that Elsa had made a threat in the tweet, which was actually about her disappointment with the election results. The administration, she said, “Did not listen to the person that actually has the problem. I would have shown them everything is they just asked.” She concluded, “they didn’t let me speak; they just punished me because everyone else had a problem.” This incident cause Elsa to conclude, “I am done fighting here.” After that, she said, “I got my stuff together and graduated early.”



Graduated one year
early to escape.

I was stifled, I wasn't a rebel I was just using my
right to free speech. I got my stuff together and
graduated early, I just could not stand being in
school anymore.

Figure 30. Elsa, “Graduated one year early to escape.”

Just a Body

“This is my attempt at enjoying my
body. Throughout high school I did
not have a good relationship with my
body, and it was hard to find ways to
like it. When I packed and hid my
breasts I found it more appealing.”

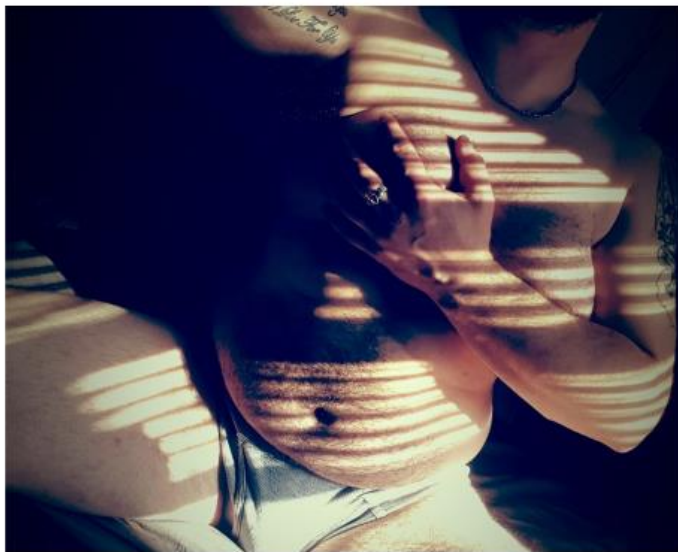


Figure 31. Flynn, “Just a Body.”

Flynn discussed wanting to be comfortable in his body. “It is not easy to feel
comfortable in your body when your trans,” he said, “especially when you haven’t had any kind

of surgery or prosthetics. This photo reflects the plus and minus relationship you have with your body.” It reflects, in his words, how “[e]very choice I made felt like I was under a microscope because I was trans. If I acted up in school, it was because I was trans.”

Playing on the train tracks

“This was taking in South Jersey on un-used train tracks with my girlfriend. While it was un-used it still felt dangerous. Coming out felt like this, like I was playing in a dangerous area- where any minute I could lose everything.”



Figure 32. Flynn, “Playing on the tracks.”

Flynn spoke about the dangers of coming out. “When you are trans,” he said, you want to scream from the mountain top. There is a part that gets very excited to answer all these questions about being trans. But, at the same time, it is very dangerous because at any time you could lose your family, your home. You could lose all the things that are important to you.

No Face

"Who am I? I am a person, but what does that mean? What do I like? Do I like them or have I been trained my whole life to like them? Does it matter? Why does it matter? Why if I could be anything do I want to be a man?"



Figure 33. Flynn, “No Face.”

“I was invisible,” Flynn said. “It would have been helpful to have a conversation about what sex or health looks like for someone who was transgender or someone who was LGBTQ because that was something I had to answer on my own.”

Eugene talked about not being able to demonstrate trans pride in school:

My friends and I would go to another town to meet with other LGBTQ teenagers. We had to drive forty-five minutes from our home. Being there was so different than being in school. This was the only way for us to get away from the issues at school. There we were empowered, it was the only thing that kept me ok.

Elsa described having to go to an LGBTQ community organization in another town to take a sex education class because the school health class only taught about abstinence. “There were no teachers I could confide in or feel comfortable talking to,” she said. “School kind of let me down. There were no policies or strict rules. I never felt protected.”

Pride

March, 2016

After nine months of being out as trans, I had accumulated so much shame. I was humiliated by teachers, invalidated by doctors, and vilified by people I thought would accept me. Regardless, I coped by fighting. I combatted the attempt to suppress my community's voice in every way I could and although pride was difficult to find, I celebrated my existence during events like the one pictured. It was called "Night of Noise" to break the silence of LGBTQ youth and empower them.



Figure 34. Eugene, "Pride."



Stay in the
shadows.

Figure 35. "Elsa, Stay in the shadows."



Figure 38. Elsa, “Safety.”



A lot of teachers are a bit oblivious as to how student see them.

Oblivion

Figure 37. Elsa, “Oblivion”

Summary

The codes derived from the questionnaires, interviews, and photographs uncovered numerous issues that both private and public-school transgender and gender non-conforming individuals faced. Ninety-five codes representing the essence of the lived high school experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming youth were similar across all of the collected data (see Table 5).

Overall, respondents portrayed schools as places that do not value gender diversity. The respondents also revealed that schools—both public and private—needed to have strict bullying policies to protect marginalized groups, including transgender and gender non-conforming students. Many of the respondents and participants were unsure of their school policies, but they indicated that the lack of strict policies made them feel unsafe at school. One respondent stated:

“It was not safe to come out.” This data parallel GLSEN’s 2017 survey, which showed that only

79.3% of the LGBTQ students attended schools with some form of a comprehensive anti-bullying/harassment policy. Only 12.6% of students reported that their school had a comprehensive policy (i.e., one that specifically enumerates both sexual orientation and gender identity/expression). Only 10.6% of LGBTQ students reported that their school or district had official policies or guidelines to support transgender or gender nonconforming students. (Kosciw et al., 2018)

The respondents and participants also underscored the need for an inclusive curriculum. Blackburn and Buckley (2005) have advocated a queer-inclusive ELA curriculum. Having a queer-inclusive curriculum allows students to see themselves reflected in the curriculum. Participants and respondents felt that health education, history, and (to a lesser degree) English classes should all address the needs of LGBTQ individuals. Participants’ responses to the

questionnaires, their photographs, and the interviews all point a similar conclusion: schools need to change to meet the needs of marginalized groups.

Table 5
Codes from all Collected Data

acceptance	dissonance	identifying	pronouns
accepting	disrespect	ignore	protection
administration	disregard	inclusive	punished
afraid	eating disorder	invisible	religion
alone	existence	isolated	resources
apparent	embarrassment	isolation	response
approval	empowering	listen	rules
attack	euphoric	locker room	safety
awareness	fear	lonely	scared
bathrooms	feminist	male	sexist
bathroom	female	mental illness	sexist discourse
binary	freak	meeting needs	shame
bisexual	gender	mis gendered	step in
body	gendered	miserable	suicide
boy	gender creative	negligence	support
bullying	gender neutral	no information normal	teachers
clothes	gender non-conforming	masculine	tom boy
conversations	health class	medication	trans
cutting	heteronormative	micro aggression	transition
curriculum	heteronormativity	opposition	uncomfortable
dangerous	history	perceive	unhappy
depressed	hospital	pride	unhealthy
depression	inappropriate		unseen
disapproval	identity		wrong

Table 6

Themes from Codes

Interpersonal Relationships			
acceptance accepting administration afraid alone dissonance existence embarrassment	fear ignore invisible isolated isolation listen lonely masculine micro aggression mis gendered miserable	negligence no information normal opposition perceive pronouns punished religion resources response	sexist sexist discourse shame step in support teachers uncomfortable unhappy unseen wrong
Harassment and Homophobia			
afraid alone apparent approval attack dangerous	body boy bullying disrespect disregard	gender creative gender neutral gender non-conforming Identity protection rules	safety scared step in support teachers
Policies			
administration bathrooms bathroom	bullying empowering inclusion	meeting needs protection resources	rules safety shame
Inclusive Curriculum			
awareness curriculum conversations	disapproval history Health class	heteronormative heteronormativity inappropriate	inclusive locker room teachers
Identity			
alone Awareness Binary Bisexual Body Boy Clothes Cutting	dangerous depressed depression eating disorder empowering euphoric female feminist	freak gender gender creative gendered gender neutral gender non-conforming hospital identifying	Male Medication Mental illness pride suicide tom boy trans transition unhealthy

Theoretical Underpinnings

All individuals—regardless of race, ability, or gender—have a desire to achieve certain goals. Achieving these goals help all humans to satisfy their own personal needs and desires (Maslow, 1943; see Table 6). The researcher looked at how Maslow’s hierarchy of needs related to the needs of high school transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. Participants in this study described feelings and events that hindered them from doing certain things. Eugene spoke of his struggles in high school. As graduation approached and other students were talking about their futures and where they were going to college:

So, I thought at this point I would be normal because I wanted to be normal. I was exhausted because of all the shame that I had gone through, I was starting to develop an eating disorder. It was a sheer reflection of the way I was treated. I have no doubt in my mind that if I wasn’t treated the way that I was, the shame wouldn’t have caused me to form such a terrible habit.

When he went to prom,

everyone else was having fun, and I was just focused on the fact that I didn’t feel like anyone else there. I had all these expectations, just thinking that it would be the one time I would feel, like, normal and okay.

He showed resilience in the face of his emotional distress: “I wasn’t thinking about my future, I wasn’t excited about anything. I was only focused on the fact that I was trans and I would do anything to feel the same was as everyone else.” The table below compares Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and what was discovered during the study using the experiences of the participants.

Table 7

Results Seated in the Theoretical Framework of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs	Research Results
Self- Actualization Personal growth and fulfillment.	All participants have grown, but there are always setbacks because of depression or other outside forces.
Aesthetic Needs Beauty, balance, and form.	Poor self-image was common in all of the interviews.
Cognitive Needs Knowledge, meaning, self- awareness.	Participants in this study addressed gaps in their educations, where they did not learn about LGBTQ history or health education, leaving them with a lack of self-awareness. They also had a sense of who they were but encountered mental and emotional issues that impeded their self-awareness.
Esteem Needs recognized, admired, prestige and power.	Participants said they felt invisible. They did not see themselves reflected in school curriculum. They also encountered issues with bathrooms and locker rooms.
Love and Belonging Love, acceptance, affiliation, stable relationships.	The participants in this study indicated that they did not feel accepted in school. Some participants sought affiliation outside of school. Participants were often rejected by family and friends.
Safety Needs Safety, security, order, stability.	The participants in this study indicated that they did not feel safe in school for various reasons.
Physiological Needs food, water, warmth, sex.	The participants indicated that they had their basic needs met but, in certain instances, they felt like something was missing.

Summary

This study was conducted to answer one main question and two sub questions. The main question was, “How do transgender and gender non-conforming young adults perceive their experience in public secondary school?”

The participants told stories of discrimination, shame, and fear. Eugene said that his experience was,

Pretty awful, I felt like the whole time I was just . . . I knew that things shouldn't have been the way they were and no one else did. I was questioning why everyone was okay with the way things were. I felt isolated. The most important part of high school was those teachers that made a difference. Because if it weren't for them, I would have never known the potential that I had as an individual. I never would have had anyone to see for more than just my identity and see through those labels.

In Flynn's words,

That was how it felt in high school. Like I was drowning where everyone else walked. Throughout high school, I did not have a good relationship with my body, and it was hard to find ways to like it. When I packed and hid my breasts, I found it more appealing. It feels lonely but determined to me. That's what it felt like. Like I was on this journey and even though I had support, I was building this bridge alone right through an ocean of doubts and fears and intolerance.

Sub Questions

The sub questions explored in this study were, “How do transgender and gender non-conforming students encounter policies and practices that they perceive to be inclusive of their

marginalized status?" and "How do they believe these policies and practices fail to protect their rights?"

The participants all felt that school policies did not protect their rights in some way or another. Bathrooms and unequal punishments were persistent topics. Teachers and administrators, they noted, have difficulty protecting students from physical and verbal abuse from both peers and teachers. Teachers are also sometimes guilty of making statements that create a hostile school environment for transgender and gender non-conforming youth.

Trans gender and gender non-conforming youth also have a difficult time finding themselves reflected in the curriculum. There are seven states in the U.S. have local or state laws that are anti homosexuality, also known as "no promo homo laws." According to GLSEN (2018), these laws

expressly forbid teachers of health/sexuality education from discussing lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) people or topics in a positive light if at all. Some laws even require that teachers actively portray LGB people in a negative or inaccurate way. Not only do these laws prevent LGBTQ young people from learning critical information about their health, but they also serve to further stigmatize LGBTQ students by providing K-12 students false, misleading, or incomplete information about LGBTQ people. (p. 1)

As of January 2018, the following states have no promo homo laws: Alabama, Arizona, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Texas (GLSEN, 2018). Alabama State Code § 16-40A-2(c)(8) is an example of some of the laws:

Sexual health education must "emphasize, in a factual manner and from a public health perspective, that homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general

public and that homosexual conduct is a criminal offense under the laws of the state.

In South Carolina Stat. § 59-32-30(5), health education

may not include a discussion of alternate sexual lifestyles from heterosexual relationships including, but not limited to, homosexual relationships except in the context of instruction concerning sexually transmitted diseases.

How does transgender and gender non-conforming students perceive school culture supporting or inhibiting their needs?

Overall, the participants found that the cultures of their schools did not support them. They felt that the administration should protect all students instead of perpetuating the status quo. This attitude is dangerous because such change may never happen. As Eugene said,

Students need to absorb knowledge and use it for your own power. You can't just listen to what everyone else is saying around you and follow the status quo. Own your thoughts, your opinions and use that to fight for yourself and not allow people to silence you.

Flynn stated that while school was a horrible experience, there were some positives, but "You have to figure it out on your own. It is apparent to me that teachers did not want to get involved and they allowed the bullying to continue."

In Elsa's words,

I don't think there was any respect for anybody. Teachers shared their own personal beliefs. They would joke and say homophobic, transphobic, and racist things because no one is handling it. Some teachers were oblivious to what was going on, especially if it

was not affecting them. Administration of the school did not allow students to have a voice.

As Eugene, who shared a photograph of himself wrapped in a transgender pride flag, said,

After nine months of being out as trans, I had accumulated so much shame. I was humiliated by teachers, invalidated by doctors, and vilified by people I thought would accept me. Regardless, I coped by fighting. I combatted the attempt to suppress my community's voice in every way I could and, although pride was difficult to find, I celebrated my existence during events.

Elsa spoke out trying to bring "awareness to issues happening outside of school. I was threatened to be suspended for my actions, but I did not change who I was and what I wanted to bring awareness too."

The health curriculum was a major concern for the participants in this study, as was the history and English language arts curriculum. The impact of not having inclusive curriculum policies is LGBTQ students facing

harassment and assault at school based on their sexual orientation and gender expression, 35.1% of students who attended schools in states with a "no promo homo" law experienced higher levels of harassment or assault compared to 26.0% of students in other states. (GLSEN, 2018, p. 1)

Interview participants in this study discussed disappointment because their schools did not discuss health and safety issues that are important for LGBTQ transgender and gender non-conforming individuals in their health classes. In Flynn's words, "I would've been perfectly happy learning about the likelihood of getting HIV through anal sex. We didn't have that conversation." Another participant said that "teachers could have had a conversation about

prep.” Participants also discussed the history curriculum in their schools: “There are many moments in LGBTQ history, moments that have changed the world. Stonewall is one of them.

It is the start of the LGBTQ rights movement, but it is not the only one.” Flynn said,

I think it is appropriate to have these conversations because it will help cisgender, heteronormative children who get to see their life represented every which way all the time. But it really will help the LGBTQ kid who does not get to see their life represented all the time.

Merida said,

that it would have been great to read queer literature. The scary thing is that the high school curriculum across the country is not addressing these things.

Education is a systematic oppression of different groups of people. Students deserve to get an education that prepares them for the world.

The impact of a non-inclusive curriculum, based on GLSEN’s 2017 National School Climate Study, LGBTQ students in schools with an LGBTQ inclusive curriculum were

less likely to hear “gay” used in a negative way, were less likely to hear homophobic remarks such as “fag” or “dyke,” were less likely to hear negative remarks about gender expression and transgender people, were less likely to feel unsafe because of their sexual orientation and gender expression and experienced lower levels of victimization related to their sexual orientation and gender expression.

Transgender and gender non-conforming youth are often faced with feeling powerless against teachers, school policies, and administration. Participants were powerless against the negative comments and actions of faculty and staff.

The high school experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals are complex and are similar across age or location. The research study was purposeful in its design to investigate and explore the lived high school experiences of the participants. The strength of this study was that it used first-hand accounts of high school experiences. The data and information from the questionnaire and interview participants indicate that school environments are still unsafe for transgender and gender non-conforming youth. The participants came from different regions across the United States and were of varying ages, yet their experiences were very similar. The individuals in this study faced verbal discrimination from both peers and teachers, which reflects the findings of the 2017 National Study conducted by GLSEN (Greytak et al., 2017).

CHAPTER 5

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

This photovoice study explores the lived high school experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. The researcher used aspects of phenomenology to illustrate the essence of the lived experience. This chapter includes a discussion of significant findings of the perspectives of transgender and gender non-conforming youth as they relate to school policy, inclusive curriculum, pedagogy, school safety, deficit thinking, educators bias, school leaders, queer perspectives and a sense of self. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study and areas for future research.

While this research explores the lived experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals, the depth of findings suggests that this is not just a local school problem. Rather, it is a state education problem. The depth of knowledge that was obtained from this research suggests that until state and federal government become involved and changes are made, the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming high school students will continue to be negative. These negative school experiences will continue to impact the social emotional health of these individuals.

Overview of the Study

The current literature on LGBTQ high school students “addresses the development of an LGBTQ identity, school experiences, peer relationships, and educational outcomes using large-scale data sets such as the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health.” (Wimberly & Battle, 2015, pg. 221) The large data sets focus on “health related outcomes or educational outcomes but there are few educational research articles and reports written from these data sets that specifically address LGBTQ issues” (Wimberly & Battle, 2015, pg. 221) There is little

attention paid to transgender and gender non-conforming youth. The research that does exist concerning transgender and gender non-conforming youth concentrates on young adults on college campuses and their experiences. (Bockting, Miner, & Rosser, 2007; Crawford, 2008; Doan, 2007; Drumheller & McQuay, 2010; Eliason & Hughes, 2004; Hill, 2007; Kazyak, 2011, Hill 2007) There is also limited research available that deals specifically with transgender, transitioning and gender nonconforming students at the elementary and secondary school level and their teachers. The research available that focuses on pre-K through sixth grade “does not use the student as the unit of analysis. The focus is the LGBTQ parent and the impact of the parent’s sexuality on the child’s educational experience.” (Wimberly & Battle, 2015, pg. 220) There are statistics, census and annual quantitative survey reports but very little qualitative data. There is also a lack of research on the relationships between LGBTQ students and school personnel. The research that does exist in this area concentrates on young adults on college campuses and their experiences. (Bockting, Miner, & Rosser, 2007; Crawford, 2008; Doan, 2007; Drumheller & McQuay, 2010; Eliason & Hughes, 2004; Hill, 2007; Kazyak, 2011, Hill 2007).

This study concentrated on transgender and gender non-conforming individuals ages eighteen and older. The criterion for participation in the study was that participants had to be transgender or gender non-conforming and over the age of eighteen. The qualitative data was obtained through a questionnaire, interviews, and photographs.

Participants for this study were self-identified transgender and gender non-conforming individuals over the age of eighteen. A Qualtrics demographic survey was made available in two ways, it was posted on a flyer at several colleges around the country as well as being posted on the social media website Facebook. Two hundred and fourteen individuals responded to the

survey with eighteen of the respondent's self-identified as transgender or gender non-conforming.

The researcher kept a field journal and a personal journal during the study. Both journals were beneficial to the researcher during the process. The field journal provided the researcher with the ability to manage the interview process, phone calls, emails, difficulty of connecting to participants as well as documenting participant behavior during the interviews. The researcher also collected current news articles and information throughout, from the time of proposal approval throughout the writing process. A list of articles is included in the appendix. (Appendix N)

The personal journal was valuable to the process because it provided the researcher with an outlet for personal reactions to the interviews, emotions and thoughts before and after the interviews and the days and weeks following. The interview process was emotionally and physically draining for several reasons. As an educator it was distressing and sad to hear of the struggles young men and women suffered personally during their time in high school. It is interesting that my peers experienced a similar roller coaster of emotions as they read the transcripts even though they had not meet or heard the participants' stories first hand.

Methods and Procedures

The qualitative methodology of photovoice and aspects of phenomenology provided a rich and emotional description of the transgender and gender non-conforming participants lived high school experiences. The researcher utilized photovoice and aspects of phenomenology to identify and highlight the lived experiences of each of the participants. Photovoice was most appropriate for this study combined with aspects of phenomenology. Phenomenology enabled

the researcher to get at the true essence of the participants experience. (Creswell, 1998: Van Manen,1990)

Data was collected through an open-ended questionnaire, photographs and in-depth interviews. The interviews were audio- recorded semi structured interviews of five transgender or gender non-conforming individuals from around the United States. The questionnaire and the interview protocols utilized during the in-depth interviews with participants can be located in the appendices of this study. The findings of the study were used to answer the main research question “How do transgender and gender non-conforming young adults perceive their experience in public secondary school?” The results showed that high school was a difficult time in the lives of the participants. They dealt with issues of harassment, policy issues, the lack of inclusive curriculum and identity issues. Many of these issues impacted their education and their overall feeling of being accepted in their high school. In addition to providing an understanding of the lived high school experiences, the participants also provided answers to the questions “what would I like my teachers to know?” The participants were very candid in their responses to these questions. Some had minor changes such as “try to pay attention, if you see something say something, I was crying out for help and no one called my parents.” One participant stated “I would want my teachers to know the consequences their actions had on me. I was damaged by their lack of caring and concern.” Another participant stated that “I want them to know that people like me exist and there is nothing they can do about it. Teachers should probably just learn how to respect them, learn how to educate themselves and to provide equal treatment to all of their students.” Teachers should “try to go out of their way to see if students are okay, reach out, let me exist without making it a spectacle and embarrassing me.”

Other participants discussed the role administration played in their high school experience. One participant said “I would have liked administration to believe me when I went to them with an issue of harassment. I would tell them how important it is to listen and communicate with students.”

There were two other questions that this study tried to answer “How do transgender and gender non-conforming students encounter policies and practices that they perceive to be inclusive of their marginalized status? How do they believe these policies and practices fail to protect their rights?” and “How does school culture support or inhibit the needs of transgender and gender nonconforming students?”

In answer to the question about inclusive policies and practices, participants in both the interviews and respondents of the questionnaire stated that they did not feel their high schools had inclusive policies and practices. There was an exception for two participants that stated that their schools had an LGBTQ club or GSA at their high school. Many participants voiced a need for a LGBTQ club or a GSA to help build acceptance. All participants reported a lack of an inclusive curriculum as well as the lack of bullying policies. Two participants discussed the excitement of obtaining a gender- neutral bathroom at their school, but also indicated that were issues in obtaining a key for the locked bathroom. Others discussed how difficult it was to always have to use the nurse’s office to go to the bathroom. Another participant talked about how he had to wander around school to find a bathroom that he could use safely. Most participants felt their high schools were not safe places to be out.

In answer to the question about school climate the responses varied. One participant stated that the school climate hindered his growth because a majority of teachers and students

made him feel uncomfortable. One participant felt the climate at the school took away their voice and did not allow them to speak out about issues and problems in the school. Another participant stated that even though the school was a public school the major religion in the community impacted the school climate in a negative way.

Discussion

The question and sub questions were kept in mind during the interview process with participants. The data was coded and analyzed for themes and sub themes based on the participant interviews, photographs and answers to the questionnaire. Several themes and sub themes appeared to be central to the lived high school experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. Using the themes that were derived from the questionnaires, interviews and participants provided photographs. The following overarching themes and sub themes were developed. These themes and sub themes provide a voice to the lived high school experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. It is worth mentioning again that there was a 10-year gap between the youngest interview participant (age 20) and the oldest interview participant (age 30), yet the stories were similar.

Table 8
Significant Research Findings

Significant Research Findings
<p style="text-align: center;">Interpersonal Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to participants, faculty and staff are dismissive of transgender and gender non-conforming student experiences • According to participants, there is a lack of acceptance shown by faculty and staff toward transgender and gender non-conforming students. • According to participants, there is a lack of acceptance shown by peers. • According to participants, returning to school after dealing with hospitalization for mental illness was difficult because of teacher reaction.
<p style="text-align: center;">Harassment and homophobia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to participants, there is a lack of respect shown by teachers toward transgender and gender non-conforming students. • According to participants, there is a lack of authentic relationships with faculty. • According to participants, safety in school is a major issue. • According to participants, classrooms are reflective of teacher’s implicit bias. • According to participants, the use of proper pronouns is an issue in school
<p style="text-align: center;">Policies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to participants and research there is lack of school, state and federal policies protecting the rights of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. • According to participants there is a lack of gender -neutral bathrooms in many high schools • According to participants, there is a lack of gender -neutral locker rooms. • According to participants, their high schools did not have a written policy about harassment toward transgender and gender non-conforming students. Harassment was dealt with on a student by student basis.
<p style="text-align: center;">Inclusive Curriculum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to participants, their high schools did not provide health and sex education that met the needs of LGBTQ individuals. • According to participants, they did not see themselves reflected in History/social studies curriculum. There was no mention of homosexual individuals, events and movements. • According to participants, ELA/English curriculum did not include the reading of novels or stories about homosexual individuals, or events
<p style="text-align: center;">Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to participants, transgender and gender non-conforming individuals are experiencing mental illness based on the trauma suffered while in high school. • According to participants, they suffered depression, poor body image, self-harm and suicidal ideation throughout high school and after high school.

Interpretation of findings

Relating Themes to the Theoretical Underpinnings

Queer Theory

Most of the research that exists is based on the needs of the larger LGBTQ community. Foucault's (1978) theory of power emerged as a way to make sense of how school administration applied their authority to enact policies, as well as their response to verbal and physical discrimination by peers and teachers. Eugene discussed how certain teachers made him feel uncomfortable in their classes and the school and when it was brought to the attention of the administrator the principal sided with the teacher. Foucault (1978) examines "the historical relationships of power and the discourse on sex." (p. 90) Foucault (1978) laid the foundation for Queer Theory in *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*; he theorized that sexual identity is produced within the knowledge-power relationship. In some cases, school administration uses their power to perpetuate discrimination; it is seen in schools that do not allow GSAs as well as in the bathroom and locker room policies that exists. The idea of homosexuality and heterosexuality has contributed to discrimination and the unequal treatment of queer people. (Sedgwick, 1990) The queer theorist Sedgwick (1990) states:

“...the turn of the century was the world mapping by which every given person just as he was necessarily assigned to a male or female gender, was now considered necessarily assignable as well as homo- or heterosexuality, a binarized identity that was full of implications (p.2).”

Since some states are slow to provide queer pedagogy and curriculum, they are continuing to allow inequality in our classrooms. The participants in this study indicated that they never saw themselves reflected in the curriculum and that it would have been beneficial to them. Stainback

& Stainback supported this (1990) stating that, “an inclusive school is a place where everyone belongs and is accepted (p. 3). GLSEN’s 2017 report supports the need for inclusive education stating, “LGBTQ student experiences may also be shaped by the inclusion of LGBTQ-related information in the curriculum. Learning about LGBTQ historical events and positive role models may enhance LGBTQ students’ engagement in their schools and provide valuable information about the LGBTQ community.” (p. 56) Heteronormative learning environments, as well as racist learning environments, are a detriment for all students. Foucault (1978) argues discourse about sex has increased rather than decreased. This norm is seen in education today. “The central issue is to account for the fact that it is spoken about (sex), to discover who does the speaking, the positions and the viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions which prompt people to talk about it and which store and distribute the things that are said.” (p. 11) Schools today inadvertently support heteronormative pedagogy and curriculum. Only three states (California, New York and New Jersey) in the United States have legally mandated the teaching of LGBTQ issues, events and history. When we avoid or dismiss queer sexualities, students subliminally learn that heterosexuality is the norm:

It would be less than exact to say that the pedagogical institution has imposed a heavy silence on the sex of children and adolescents. Since the eighteenth century, it has multiplied the forms of discourse on the subject: it has established various points of implantation for sex; it has coded contents and qualified speakers. Speaking about children’s sex, inducing educators, physicians, administrators, and parents to express of it, or speaking to them about it, causing children themselves to talk about it, and enclosing them in a web of discourses which sometimes address them, sometimes talk about them, or impose canonical

bits of knowledge on them, or use them as a basis for constructing a science that is beyond their grasp- all of this together enables us to link an intensifications of power to a multiplication of discourse. The sex of children and adolescents has become, since the eighteenth century, an important area of contention around which innumerable institutional devices and discursive strategies have been deployed. (Foucault, 1978, p. 29-30).

The study participants spoke about the importance of a positive queer curriculum and that teachers need to stop skipping over topics that are controversial or deal explicitly with LGBTQ issues. Their experiences highlight the fact that queer and trans content is omitted and silenced in our school and is supported by recent research. (Greytak et al., 2015, 2017; Kosciw et al., 2016; Kosciw et al., 2014) A diverse gender curriculum has a direct correlation with less hostile school climates for LGBTQ students. (Greytak et al. 2017) A 2016 school climate study found that only 22.4% of LGBTQ youth received trans or queer positive curricula. (Kosciw et al., 2016)

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (2017) defines emotional safety as a feeling that is achieved when one feels safe and is able to express emotion, feelings of security; and confidence to take risks. Participants spoke in length about safety and feeling safe in their high school. There are many issues that need to be considered regarding the safety of transgender and gender non-conforming students in high school. The United States has seen in the last eight years a rise in the suicide rate among LGBT teenagers because of verbal, and physical violence. (Servantez, 2010) They also discussed their interpersonal relationships, or the lack thereof, with teachers, administrators and staff. Those interviewed discussed how this

lack of connection made it difficult to feel safe at school. Eugene spoke at length about the teacher who misgendered him the entire school year and how it was difficult for him to be successful in that class. Flynn spoke about hurting himself and how his history teacher and his gym teacher never talked about or informed his parents. “They just did not care” he said. Elsa said, “when I returned to school after being in the hospital for depression and anxiety the teachers would just pile the work on that I had missed.”

When participants discussed their high school curriculum, they all spoke about the lack of inclusive course of study in health education classes, history (social studies) and ELA (English). Merida shared the story about her Advanced Placement U.S. History examination and the fact that she was never acquainted with the LGBT movement of the 1960s because her school was not allowed to teach about homosexuality. It is unclear to the researcher if it was because at the time Utah was a No Promo Homo state or was it because of the religious belief of the community. All of the participants discussed the lack of health education for LGBTQ individuals but specifically not having discussions about safe homosexual sex. Many participants had to seek out this knowledge elsewhere. This lack of inclusion and acceptance is a natural human need that provides individuals with a sense of belonging.

All participants in this study discussed their identity and their lack of self-esteem at times during their lives. They talked about mental health issues, suicide and self-harm. Most have talked about how much better things are since they left high school and how damaging to their self-esteem those years were. The lack of compassion and student teacher relationship “impacted my view of myself, it has taken a long time to understand myself.”

The negative high school experiences led to these individuals having a difficult time seeking advice and assistance from faculty and staff in their schools. One of the participants

graduated early because they felt a need to remove themselves from the negativity of high school. Participants did share stories about positive interactions with staff that helped them to overcome obstacles and complete high school. According to Knaier (2017) the lack of support in the school setting has the greatest impact on LGBTQ students. “If LGBTQ students had the same support system the heterosexual, cisgender students have, they might not face the lack of support and recognition.”

One participant, Eric, talked about not transitioning until college because of fear of disclosure to his family, he was fearful of his family’s rejection. This supports Fontaine’s (1998) idea that LGBT youth are afraid to come out because they fear rejection by friends and family. Of the five interviews that were conducted all of the participants indicated that they knew they were in the wrong body in middle school or younger. Flynn said, “I was a tomboy in elementary school, and I began to feel the dissonance between my gender identity and my sex in middle school.” Eugene stated that “I knew in elementary school that he was not in the right body.”

Some of the participants discussed either being part of a GSA or an LGBTQ club in their school and how empowered they felt to make small changes. Other participants discussed the lack of such clubs in their schools. School board and in school administrative support for GSAs sends the clear message that student voice and initiative are valued and encouraged. Student ideas are essential, and student contributions are recognized. In essence, to validate the life experiences of sexual minority youth, GSAs are one way to help ensure that each member of every school community is valued and respected regardless of sexual orientation or gender/identity or expression (Clarke & MacDougall, 2012, p. 156).

While conducting the interviews, several of the participants spoke about positive connections with adults in the school building. Eugene talked about his music history teacher, “I will never forget that he went out of his way to make sure I was cool with the discussion of Freddy Mercury and his sexuality. He did it in a way that wasn’t making me feel like I was an inconvenience.” In GLSEN’s 2017 National School Climate Report discussed the importance of supportive adults in school “supportive teachers, principals, and other school staff serve as another valuable resource for LGBTQ students. Several participants in this study spoke about not having positive support at school and how it harmed their ability to navigate the negativity of high school. Elsa and Flynn both spoke about returning to school after being in the hospital and encountering negative behaviors from teachers. Participants also discussed school safety and bathroom/locker room policies as well as the use of proper pronouns by faculty and staff. Schindel’s (2008) qualitative study paid close attention to how:

Youth are creating spaces to educate school administrators and fellow students about options for thinking beyond the binary and about how people live beyond the binary. Their efforts entail both practical options from transgender youth in schools, such as gender-neutral bathroom and changing pronouns, as well as dialogue, exercises, and strategies for expanding the way people conceptualize gender and sexuality (p.65).

Transgender and gender non-conforming students are experiencing today new gendered segregation. When bathrooms become an issue in schools and individuals are fearful of using certain facilities or are barred from using bathroom facilities, we have to look at the bigger picture. (Kosciw et al, 2018) According to the GLSEN 2017 National School Climate Survey, four in ten students avoided gender-segregated spaces in school because they felt unsafe or

uncomfortable (bathrooms: 42.7%; locker rooms: 40.6%). GLSEN also reported that transgender, genderqueer and non-binary students reported more hostile school experiences than LGBQ cisgender students. (2017)

Merida said “gender-neutral bathrooms are a big deal,” Flynn said, “it is just a bathroom.” If you are transgender or gender non-conforming a bathroom is a big deal. Eugene spoke in detail about the gender-neutral bathroom at his school; it was located in an inconvenient place, he said he spent more time traveling to and from the bathroom to class, as well as the time spent looking for a custodian to unlock the bathroom. The barrier associated with using the bathroom magnified their “otherness.” Having a separate bathroom facility segregated transgender and gender non-conforming students much in the same vein as colored bathroom did during the Jim Crow era. Jim Crow laws were enacted in the United States after the Civil War; these southern laws were implemented to segregate blacks from whites in the south.

On February 12, 2019 the South Dakota House of Representatives passed HB 1108 that states, “No instruction in gender dysphoria may be provided to any student in kindergarten through grade seven in any public school in the state.” (2019) If this law is approved it will bar teachers from teaching about transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. This would hurt transgender youth because they would not be acknowledged, and it would add to the feeling of segregation.

The lack of a supportive community also played a role of the participants self-esteem and sense of belonging. Many participants felt that they were on the outer fringes of the community and sometimes excluded themselves from participating in school events. Other participants were excluded from events because “it might make others feel uncomfortable” or it “may cause more problems.” The participants stated that they are on a continuous journey for love and

acceptance, even though they are out of high school and the memories of the issues they encountered during those years have left some of them traumatized. “The trauma is real, when I return home for the holidays and I run into classmates from high school the tension and sadness came back.”

The findings from this study support the idea of resilience. Each of the participants have faced or are still facing trauma at the hands of schools, teachers, families and peers. Each participant has battled or is still battling mental illness. In her research study, Singh (2012) found five domains capturing experiences of resilience: (1) evolving, simultaneous self-definition of gender identities; (2) being aware of experiences of adultism; (3) self-advocacy in educational systems; (4) finding one’s place in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning youth community; and (5) using social media to affirm one’s identities as a transgender-identifying youth. Most of the participants in this research study have demonstrated resiliency. This resiliency helps individuals to continue on their journey of self-actualization.

Conceptual Framework

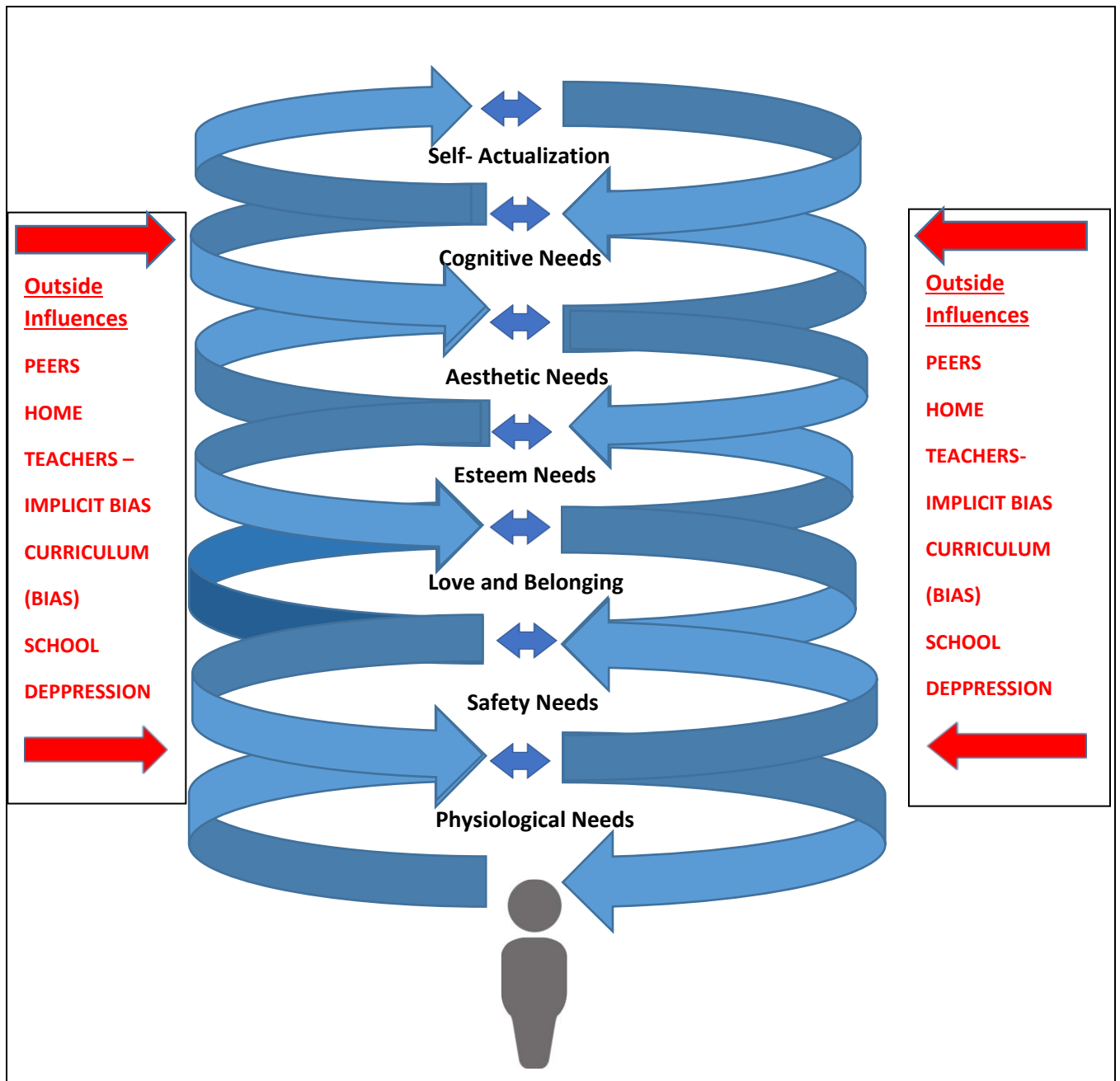


Figure 38. Conceptual framework. (Weltsek, B.M)

The above figure (figure 40) combines Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Spiral Dynamics (Graves, 1970, 1974, 1996). Spiral Dynamics goes beyond Maslow's hierarchy of needs to explore why humans have different behaviors, values, and worldviews, and how there are specific stages of human value development (Beck & Cowan, 1996; Graves, 1974). Spiral Dynamics views adult psychological development; a particular color represents each stage. Spiral Dynamics is based on values and a person's ability to maneuver more complex life challenges. In the Spiral Dynamics model, the hierarchy of individual needs is not as Maslow implied: unfulfilled needs lower on the ladder inhibit the person from climbing to the next step. Individuals do not function independently from outside forces. Instead, we consistently function in response to what is happening in and around us. In the words of Graves (1974),

the psychology of the mature human being is an unfolding or developing process marked by the progressive subordination of older behavioral systems to newer, higher order behavioral systems. The mature man normally tends to change his psychology as the conditions of his existence change. (p. 72)

Both the Hierarchy of Needs and the Spiral Dynamics models move in a hierarchical pattern from a large base to a small point. This type of thinking gives the illusion that few people reach the top of the hierarchy. The premise of the researcher's conceptual framework (Weltsek, 2019), by contrast, is not based on a hierarchy but on the fluidity of movement between the stages of development. This fluidity reflects that individuals move freely from one stage to another based on where they are at any given time. Transgender and gender non-conforming individuals could have their basic needs of safety unmet one day and move up the

cycle another day based on mood or emotion. This can be seen in the answers given during the interview as well as in the photographs.

Given limited research conducted on the high school experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals, this emphasis of this study was on exposing the high school experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming youth. Its purpose, following Paulo Freire (1972), was to give voice to a marginalized group to help bring about positive change. Freire was a champion of the poor and powerless who worked to help those in need act on their own behalf. Freire, in his work with the global south nations of the world, realized that repression and exclusion is a political and economic issue not limited to developing nations. In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972), he discussed the need for educators to ground education in the life experiences of those they teach. Freire also emphasized the importance of communication and dialogue. For him, the model of education in which education is a bank from which individuals withdraw knowledge places authority with the teacher and the community. Instead, he proposed, teachers and students should engage in discussions based on mutual respect as they work together to build up their communities. Freire also believed that involved citizens who are engaged in dialogue can use their voices to transform society. Such a transformation can only be accomplished when individuals engage in action. This study brought together transgender and gender non-conforming individuals and had them engage with the researcher to shed light on their problems in high school and reflect on what might be done to solve these problems.

Implications for Theory and Research

This study has attempted to add to the empirical literature on the high school experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. The lived high school experiences of

transgender and gender non-conforming individuals are varied but they had overarching needs and concerns. These needs and concerns dealt with interpersonal relationship with faculty and staff, a lack of inclusive curriculum, the lack of school policy dealing with the harassment of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals, negative school climate toward transgender and gender non-conforming individuals, and identity and sense of self.

District and building leadership need to play a role in school reform. Participants in this study spoke about feeling a lack of support from building and district administration. There may need to be further research into how a district on Long Island, New York was able to create positive changes for LGBTQ students in their schools and district. Jericho School District has school and district leadership that is dedicated to implementing LGBTQ positive programs for both students and teachers. (Sadowski, 2017, pg. 39-52) Jericho is an example of a district where the superintendent of schools and the building principal have taken an active role in implementing and maintaining LGBTQ positive programs. According to Sudowski (2017), Jericho still needs to work more closely with parents and other stakeholders in the community. The effective district and school leadership has provided a supportive environment for LGBTQ students: “encouraging and supporting teachers, counselors, and other school personnel to take proactive measures that foster positive educational environments; responding appropriately to complaints of harassment; permitting all students to express themselves in a respectful manner; and modeling the level of respect that is expected of members of the school community.” (Orr & Komosa-Hawkins, 2013, pg. 110)

The researcher did not intend to ask questions about mental illness, depression, anorexia, suicidal ideation, and self-harm. These developed organically during the photo elicitation process. These constructs may suggest a need for more training in the mental health field for

school counselors and teachers, to help educators recognize the signs of depression, anorexia, and self-harm, as well as the need for more training for school counselors and teachers, to help educators recognize the signs of depression, anorexia, and self-harm and how they can help support transgender and gender non-conforming youth.

In a recent article, Kosciw (2019) speaks about the results of a new report released by GLSEN in partnership with American Council for School Social Work, the American School Counselor Association, and the School Social Work Association of America. The *Supporting Safe and Healthy Schools for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) Students* report examined data from a national online survey of school counselors, psychologists, and social workers in U.S. schools, grades 5 to 12. The results reported that:

“seventy percent of school-based mental health providers receive little to no competency training in their graduate programs related to working with lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, and over 80 percent receive little to no competency training related to working with transgender people. In terms of professional development, over a third reported having never received any formal education or training on LGBTQ-specific student issues during their professional careers. Without LGBTQ-inclusive training at the graduate level and in ongoing professional development, even the most well-intentioned school-based mental health providers may be left without the critical skills they need to support and advocate for LGBTQ students.”

Based on the participants in this study all the interview participants suffer from depression, all of them had or have poor self -image of themselves, all of them have hurt themselves in one way or another and one participant spoke about suicide. Research on transgender and gender non-conforming individuals state that “transgender individuals are at higher risk for suicide than non-transgender individuals.” (Wolford, C. 2017, pgs. 69-72)

Researchers with the American Institute for Research (2013) established ten standards of care that are necessary for organizations and systems to help promote positive outcomes for LGBT youth. To provide transgender and gender non-conforming students with the appropriate standards of care needed for their social emotional development schools, districts and the surrounding community need to create safe environments in which adolescents can openly express their gender diversity. (White, 2006) Locker rooms, bathrooms, school sports, gym classes, school records, and dress codes require the attention of administration, faculty and staff to ensure a positive social environment is created for transgender students. (Beemyn, 2005; Sausa, 2005) Providing transgender and gender non-conforming youth with positive standards of care that focuses on building the young person's confidence, competence, and social connectedness will help to promote their resilience.

Further research is also needed in New York and New Jersey to document how schools are implementing their new LGBTQ inclusive curriculum, as well as teacher training for the implementation of new curriculum. Participants also stated that there should be the availability for teacher training so teachers can learn how to be sensitive to the needs of their LGBTQ students. According to the research, parents of LGBT students are concerned with safety and comfort issues first; their second concern was a lack of an inclusive curriculum for their children (Ray & Gregory, 2001). In the Ray and Gregory study about one third of the parents that participated in the study believed that there was an omission of LGBT issues in the curricula. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (2015), “gender identity is established by age 4, though children’s awareness and understanding of being transgender may emerge at any time during the K-12 years.” (Kahn,2016)

Transgender and gender nonconforming identities are virtually nonexistent in the curricula at the elementary and secondary level and in teacher preparation programs. (Gorski, Davis & Reiter, 2013; Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014). Schools are supposed to be safe places for our students, but it can also subject them to both subtle as well as hostile lessons about how people act, their role in society and who they should be. School curriculum need to be developed to be inclusive of all races, religions, and genders. For educator's, inclusive curriculum development can be risky. Teachers may have unsupportive administrators or Boards of Education who may provide push back on a gender inclusive curriculum. Research shows that LGBTQ students in schools that have inclusive curricula hear fewer homophobic and transphobic comments and feel more accepted by classmates (Kosciw et al., 2014).

Participants also discussed the need for safe bathrooms and, locker rooms for transgender and gender non-conforming individuals as well as safe spaces for the community of LGBTQ students to meet and be together. The findings of this research support the idea that a student needs to feel they belong to the school and the surrounding community. The participants in this study wanted to have a relationship with their teachers, when teachers were supportive and aware of issues of harassment it improved the students sense of self-esteem and belonging.

In a 2011 Human Rights Watch study, seven states were visited, one hundred and forty LGBTQ youths between the ages of 12 and 21 and one hundred and thirty adults including teachers, administrators, and other school staff were interviewed. The outcome of the report contains information that shows the failure of federal, state and local governments when it comes to the protection of LGBTQ student's human rights. The Human Rights Watch has several recommendations for the implementation of nondiscrimination policies, training of school staff and monitoring school districts for compliance. The research also states that in the last decade,

transgender and gender nonconforming youth have become more visible in high schools and on college campuses. This population is the most underserved population in K- 12 schools and on college campuses. They have largely been ignored in the academic literature. To provide a look into the experiences of transgender and gender nonconforming youth, *Serving the Needs of Transgender College Students* provides a brief history of transgenderism before discussing the handful of published narratives by transgender youth. It concludes with recommendations for educators seeking to improve the campus climate for people of all genders. This lack of visibility and protection translates into a lack of safe spaces including bathrooms and locker rooms.

According to John Dewey (1897) “education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform.” (p.80) If this statement is true one hundred and twenty years later, then the high school experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals should be at the forefront of educational reform.

Social and Political Climate

Throughout this process the researcher kept a log of current events surrounding transgender and gender non-conforming issue in the news. Many of the articles were obtained through the Huffington Post, The Advocate, New York Times, GLSEN, as well as local news stories from around the country. The articles reflected an everchanging landscape for this marginalized group. From the U.S. military banning transgender troops from transitioning while in uniform, to an assistant principal in West Virginia being fired for sexually harassing a fifteen- year old transgender boy. Still other stories dealt with issues of inclusive curriculum in schools being banned and new laws that made it illegal not to teach about LGBTQ issues and events. There are dozens of news stories daily from around the country and around the world. It will be interesting

to see if transgender and gender non-conforming issues will change in the coming months and years as political representation changes.

Limitations

A major limitation of this study was the low number of participants. During the thirty days that the demographic survey was open the researcher received a private message on Facebook from an individual. The message stated “I will definitely share this with my friends. I can’t promise they will want to do it only because high school and reminiscing on that as marginalized people can be difficult, but I will share. I am a student assistant at an LGBTQ center at my college, so I am connected with the people I think you want to speak to.” This message provided a great amount of insight into the lack of participants.

The major limitation of this study was the lack of male to female transgender individuals. Despite targeted efforts towards recruiting more diverse participants, both in terms of gender, gender identity, religious and racial/ethnic background, the final sample turned out to be six individuals. Of the six participants one individual did not disclose how they identified, one participant was gender non-conforming individual and four transgender males. All the participants in this study were white and had finished high school and had either graduated college or were enrolled in college. This suggests that study recruitment did not reach or attract diverse participants. The researcher wonders if the results would have been different with stories from individuals that transitioned from male to female.

Implications for Practice

There is a critical need to prepare faculty and staff for the changing face of their classroom population. Given the needs highlighted by this study our schools need to change to meet the needs of our transgender and gender non-conforming students. According to a new

study conducted by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and published in the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, nearly 2 percent of high school students in the United States identify as transgender (2017). Schools need to be prepared for name changes, they need to have discrimination and harassment policies in place, and they must be aware of how to change student records.

Teachers need to be aware of important definitions and terminology associated with transgender and gender non-conforming individuals as well as the use of proper pronouns when addressing students. Schools need to be prepared for issues of sports and physical education as well as be prepared for bathroom and locker room issues. Schools need to be able to make provisions for reviewing and eliminating stigmatizing gender policies, rules and practices such as gender-based graduation gowns, separate male and female lines and special attire for graduation pictures. Practices such as these can enhance and increase feeling of marginalization and feelings of invisibility. Based on their research with LGBTQ teens, Poirier and Francis state there are:

ten standards of care that are necessary for organizations and systems to promote positive outcomes for LGBT youth, these standards include the need to conduct regular needs assessments to understand staff capacity and guide/monitor improvement efforts, establish and enforce nondiscrimination policies, build staff awareness, knowledge, and skills by providing training and professional development opportunities, incorporate appropriate intake and data collection processes, promote safe, supportive, culturally competent environments, implement practices that support preferences and affirm identity, promote healthy, supportive peer connections, strengthen family connections, promote access to

affirming services and supports, and collaborate with other local youth and family organizations. (2012)

Participants in this study made it very clear that they did not see themselves reflected in the health, history and ELA curriculum. Elsa stated, “I didn’t learn anything, I think teachers definitely skimmed over things they didn’t want to talk about because it was controversial or just because they didn’t think it was right.” She went on to say “it should be mandatory to talk about all of that because all of that is basically what is going on today. That is why we have the population who are not recognized.” Merida spoke about Advance Placement U.S. History curriculum and how their teacher did not teach about the Stonewall Riots. The table below illustrates the key concept highlighting feminist, gay and lesbian activists mobilized behind claims for legal, economic and social equality.

Table 9 *Advanced Placement US History Framework*

Related Thematic Learning Objectives (Focus of Exam Questions)	Key Concept 8.2 — New movements for civil rights and liberal efforts to expand the role of government generated a range of political and cultural responses.
<p>NAT-4.0: Analyze relationships among different regional, social, ethnic, and racial groups, and explain how these groups’ experiences have related to U.S. national identity.</p> <p>POL-2.0: Explain how popular movements, reform efforts, and activist groups have sought to change American society and institutions.</p> <p>CUL-3.0: Explain how ideas about women’s rights and gender roles have affected society and politics.</p> <p>CUL-4.0: Explain how different group identities, including racial, ethnic, class, and regional identities, have emerged and changed over time.</p> <p>GEO-1.0: Explain how geographic and environmental factors shaped the development of various communities and analyze how competition for and debates over natural resources have affected both interactions among different groups and the development of government policies.</p>	<p>II. Responding to social conditions and the African American civil rights movement, a variety of movements emerged that focused on issues of identity, social justice, and the environment.</p> <p>A. Feminist and gay and lesbian activists mobilized behind claims for legal, economic, and social equality.</p> <p>B. Latino, American Indian, and Asian American movements continued to demand social and economic equality and a redress of past injustices.</p> <p>C. Despite an overall affluence in postwar America, advocates raised concerns about the prevalence and persistence of poverty as a national problem.</p> <p>D. Environmental problems and accidents led to a growing environmental movement that aimed to use legislative and public efforts to combat pollution and protect natural resources. The federal government established new environmental programs and regulations.</p>

The following is an example of an Advanced Placement U. S. History question:

Question 12 refers to the following excerpt from a 1969 newspaper report on the Stonewall Riot:

“A police raid on the Stonewall Inn, a tavern frequented by homosexuals at 33 Christopher St., just east of Sheridan Square in Greenwich Village, triggered a near-riot early today...hundreds of passersby shouting “Gay Power” and “We Want Freedom” laid siege to the tavern with an improvised battering ram, garbage cans, bottles, and beer cans in a protest demonstration. Police reinforcements were rushed to the tavern to deal with the disturbances, which continued for more than two hours.”

12. What concerns in the gay and lesbian community sparked the Stonewall Riot?

- A. Demands to reduce police harassment and legal repression
- B. Demands for equal marriage rights
- C. Protests against the “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” policy in the armed forces
- D. A desire to bring attention to the AIDS epidemic

The answer to the question is choice A. If you are a student that was not taught about the social and political issues surrounding the gay and lesbian equality movement, or the AIDS epidemic or “Don’t ask Don’t Tell” you would not be able to answer this question.



Figure 39: Eric “I came out to my mother in front of the Stonewall Inn.”

When speaking about school curriculum Eugene said:

“It should not be this uncomfortable topic that no one talks about. It should be normalized because that’s the issue with most things is that students feel isolated and ashamed because it is not normalized. Every narrative that they read, everything in history they are learning about is not them. Curriculum should be non-bias; the most important thing is to not make students feel ashamed and isolated. You need to acknowledge the fact that there is LGBTQ history. In school we read an Oscar Wilde book and my teacher denied the fact that he was gay. She refused to believe it even though it was such a prominent part of his life and we (the students) were aware of it. Someone tried to challenge her, and she refused to admit it. Things like that perpetuate the fact that we do not need to

acknowledge LGBTQ writers, that it is not necessary, it's scandalous. It would be so easy to implement and acknowledge the existence of LGBTQ people.

Merida expressed concern over the fact that their public-school education did not teach about LGBTQ history, events and individuals.

The researcher spent some time looking at state social studies curriculums. South Carolina's United States History Standard (2011) USHC-8: The students will demonstrate and understanding of social, economic and political issues in contemporary America. Indicator 8.1 Analyze the African American Civil Rights Movement. There is no mention of the Stonewall Riot or LGBTQ rights. California's History-Social Science Framework (2016) grade 11 Contemporary American Society,

includes the study of civil rights for people of color, immigrants, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) Americans, and disabled Americans.

“Consideration should be given to the major social and political challenges of contemporary America. Issues inherent in contemporary challenges can be debated, and experts from the community may be invited as speakers. The growth of the LGBT rights movement, for example, led to the pioneering role of gay politicians such as Elaine Noble, who was elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1974, and Harvey Milk, elected in 1977 to the San Francisco Board Supervisors.

California's social science framework lays out specific LGBT people and events that need to be addressed in the United States curriculum.

The researcher looked at Utah's Social Studies framework. United States History II addresses the making of modern America. When it comes to discussing the civil rights

movement Utah's social studies framework does not address LGBT equality or the Stonewall Riot.

U.S. II Standard 4.3: Students will identify the civil rights objectives held by various groups, assess the strategies used, and evaluate the success of the various civil rights movements in reaching their objectives, paying specific attention to American Indian, women, and other racial and ethnic minorities.

With only three states mandating the teaching of LBGTQ history that leaves forty-seven states addressing portions of history that they deem important. All curriculum should include positive representation of all people including LGBTQ individuals. LGBTQ representation in history and ELA curriculum can affirm transgender and gender non-conforming students and align with Common Core standards.

Recommendations for Educators

Best Practices

Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullen in their book *Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School*, define best practices as “existing practices that already possess a high level of widely-agreed effectiveness.” (2012) Teachers can encourage non-bias classroom environments by developing curriculum and lessons that avoid stereotypes and bias. These lessons should provide positive representation of marginalized groups including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender non-conforming people, events and history. School should also provide a comprehensive health curriculum that includes lessons and discussions relevant to transgender and gender non-conforming youth. Each of the participants in this study discussed curriculum in history and ELA but their biggest concern was health education. Eugene discussed

the lack of appropriate health education classes. “there was no information given that would benefit anybody that doesn’t fall into the binary, trans people were never part of the conversation.”

Flynn said, “I would have been perfectly happy learning about the likelihood of getting HIV through anal sex, but we did not have that conversation.” A national comprehensive health education curriculum would help transgender and gender non-conforming students not only feel like they were a part of the discussion, but it would provide them with much needed information.

There are many pedagogical practices that can be used to support a non-bias classroom, the most important is to continually model in your behavior how you expect your students to act. Teachers need to model respect and acceptance, so their students learn acceptance and how to treat each other with respect. Another important practice is to expose students to accurate accounts of history, and the contributions of diverse peoples. For example, when studying Francis Bacon in science or history class, acknowledge his gay identity, teach about Harvey Milk and the Stonewall Riot.

Schools need to value students’ lives and identities, this can be done in several ways. There are ways to learn about students without being intrusive, for example on the first day of school ask students to fill out an index card and provide you with the following information,

1. What would you like to be called in class?
2. What is your preferred pronoun?
3. Is there anything you need me to know about you?

These three simple questions provide students with the opportunity to share important information with the teacher. This information also encourages a positive teacher-student relationship and can provide direction when choosing relevant texts for the class. It can also

identify potential topics that could become an issue. Teachers need to create a safe climate for all students, they need to cultivate positive relationships, empathy, develop conflict resolution skills and focus curriculum on understanding differences.

Assessment, Evaluation and Grading

Teachers should also reflect on how they evaluate student progress. Value-based assessment, evaluation and grading have the ability to promote equity, respect and justice. Values-based assessments can be included in rubrics and scoring guides, for example, works respectfully with peers or student, includes multiple points of view in their writing. When having students work collaboratively, they need to be able resolve conflicts within the group as well as deal with multiple perspectives on a topic. These are skills that can be evaluated along with an evaluation of academic content.

Implicit Bias

Implicit bias refers to the attitudes and stereotypes that unconsciously affect people's perceptions, actions, and decisions (Kirwan Institute for Race and Ethnicity). Implicit bias is often stands in opposition to a person's stated beliefs. Educators need to become aware of their implicit biases. Verna Myers in her Ted Talk defines biases as "the stories we make up about people before we know who they are." On their website the Anti Deformation League has a section on education, and they provide information on anti-bias education, bullying and cyber bullying prevention, LGBTQ rights and race and racial justice.

Policies

State and district level policies must be coupled with appropriate training and implementation so that administrators, faculty, and staff know how to adhere to policies and best support trans and GNC youth in their schools. Implementation includes assessing school

facilities and identifying options that are gender affirming and protect the safety and privacy of all students. In the absence of such policies, schools can and should implement best practices in supporting and including trans and GNC students.

Many states have laws protecting transgender and gender non-conforming students. The following states have state rules or guidance for schools, California, Colorado, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington (National Center for Transgender Equality) These eighteen states have made provisions for the safety and social and emotional needs of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals in their schools.

Affirmative School Organizations

Each of the participants spoke about school organizations for LGBTQ students. Flynn stated that he wished his school had a GSA. Eugene and Elsa spoke at length about the LGBTQ club in their schools. Schools should consider developing a GSA or other LGBTQ-affirmative club. With proper support these organizations could supply a wealth of information regarding mental and physical health, support, socialization with peers and other needs. According to GLSEN (2007):

GSAs can help to make schools safer for students and may play a role in mitigating the negative impact of bullying and harassment experienced by some LGBT students. LGBT students in schools with GSAs are less likely to hear biased language, such as homophobic remarks, are less likely to feel unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation and gender expression, and are less likely to miss days of school because they are

afraid to go. In addition, GSAs may play an important role in helping students identify staff who may be supportive and to whom they can report any incidents of victimization. The presence of a GSA may offer evidence of a school's commitment to LGBT students and their allies, creating a source of perceived support for students even if they are not actively engaged with the GSA themselves. The presence of GSAs may also help to improve the school experiences of LGBT students, by increasing access to education and having a positive impact on LGBT students' academic achievement and aspirations.

The Classroom

The last recommendation is how to provide a thoughtful classroom. Classrooms send nonverbal messages about communication, justice and diversity. The classroom environment should take into account students' cultures, races, religions and gender differences. For example, in a social study class the walls could have pictures of diverse individuals like Gandhi, Aung Suu Kyi, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King and Harvey Milk. There could be a copy of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as inspirational quotes from civil rights leaders, poets and musicians. Thoughtful classroom setups and decorations can support the ideas of justice and diversity. A welcoming classroom can set the tone for the entire school year.

There are many resources for teachers and administrators provided by organizations like the ADL and GLSEN. GLSEN provides an LGBT – Inclusive Curriculum with lessons for grade kindergarten to high school, as well as lesson plans on bullying, bias and diversity and an extensive educators guide. For a comprehensive list of resources see Appendix O.

Next Steps

It is important to remember that transgender and gender non-conforming students are not monolithic. Every student comes from a different family, location/socioeconomic/cultural situations, and various types of educational and religious traditions. The individuals in this study have provided rich, in-depth descriptions of their lived high school experiences; their experiences are not meant to be generalized to all transgender and gender non-conforming people in all high schools. Their stories do, however, shed light on the impact high school had on their lives.

It is crucial that more studies be conducted in the area of lived experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming youth. Given the nature of phenomenology, a researcher could study any number of topics. For instance, the researcher recommends re-interviewing the same six individuals five years after the completion of this research. Would these individuals reflect on the high school the same way, would the shame and hurt still be there? Due to the ever-changing landscape of American education, new studies could reveal that the themes that emerged in this study would not re-emerge five years in the future.

A qualitative researcher could examine how the lived experiences have changed for other transgender, and gender non-conforming youth as the political climate of the United States changes. For example, will things change with the next presidential election, if so how?

Other studies could involve additional self-identifying transgender and gender non-conforming young adults from within the same geographic areas. It is reasonable to conclude from the results of this study and the research literature that others who self-identify as transgender or gender non-conforming have, in all likelihood, experienced bullying, harassment, shame or stigmatization (either directly or indirectly) at some point in their schooling.

Because the American public-school system reflects the values, policies, and practices of the community they serve, transgender and gender non-conforming youth struggle with revealing their identities out of fear. Unfortunately, many of the transgender and gender non-conforming young adults that participated in this study experienced varying forms of violence from others who were not accepting of their gender and identity or presentations. Some experienced physical and sexual assaults, and others experienced, verbal harassment (“fag”), intimidation (threats), humiliation, shame, isolation and fear. Some of their experiences revealed the sense of anxiety not knowing when or where they may be targeted.

Many of the participants spoke about their interactions with the adults in the building. Eugene talked about one teacher “I was working on a project for journalism class and I had to conduct a survey. I went to speak with this one teacher, and she started asking me Why are you doing this? Why do you think you’re a boy?” The behavior of the adults in school deserves more attention in bullying research. There is an assumption in much of the literature that adults preserve safety in school settings. That is frequently not the case, as seen in the experiences of the participants in this study. According to McGuire. Et al. (2008) “school personal actually contribute to the harassment of transgender students.”

The participants in this study pointed to the need for comprehensive school policies that address the concerns of transgender and gender non-conforming high school students. The existence of comprehensive policies alone cannot create safer and affirming environments for transgender and gender non-conforming youth, but they can provide transgender and gender non-conforming youth with a sense of safety and protection.

The researcher offers the following topics that could make an interesting and compelling study to deepen and broaden the education, as well as to address the limitations, of the lived high school experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals

1. What are the lived high school experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming young adults of color?
2. What are the lived high school experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming young adults in rural settings?
3. What does it mean to be an ally in high school?
4. How biased are teachers toward transgender and gender non-conforming students?

Conclusion

The purpose of conducting this study was to examine the lived high school experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. The data revealed several overarching themes (a) interpersonal relationships; (b) harassment and homophobia; (C) inclusive curriculum; (d) policies; and (e) identity. According to participants, when participants felt included in the school community, they felt empowered and they felt a greater sense of self-esteem. Inclusion in the school community based on the interpersonal relationship between students and teachers, students and students and students and staff including but not limited to the school administration was important to the participants and the lack of these relationship increased their feeling of invisibility and shame. Many of the participants are still struggling with their trauma and personal demons and feel if teachers and school had a better understanding of what transgender and gender non-conforming students need while in high school it would make it easier for the next generation of students to feel safe in school. Research that is available

concerns the larger LGBTQ community, though helpful, more research needs to be conducted to help provide insight into the needs of transgender and gender non-conforming youth

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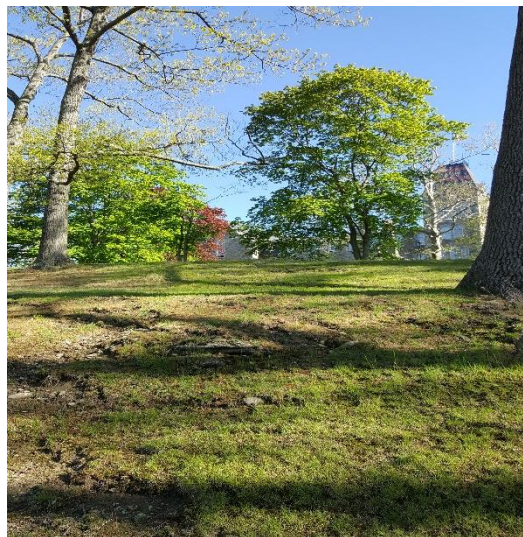
APPENDIX A

SOCIAL MEDIA BLAST

An invitation to take part in a research study.



Sights and Voices of Transgender and Gender
Non-Conforming Youth



Would you like to share your story?

Please take our survey if you would like to participate.

https://snhu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3jvPCyXPJhJFOrX

APPENDIX B

FLYER

An invitation to take part in a research study.



Sights and Voices of Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Youth



Would you like to share your story?

Please take our survey if you would like to participate.

https://snhu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3jvPCyXPJhJFOrX

APPENDIX C
DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

https://snhu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3jvPCyXPJhJFOrX

1. Do you consider yourself a member of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and/or Transgender (LGBT) community?

YES

NO

No, But I identify as an Ally

Prefer not to say

2. What is your gender?

3. Do you identify as transgender?

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

4. Do you identify as gender non- conforming or gender creative?

Yes

No

Prefer Not to Say

5. Age_____

6. Would you be interested in participating in a research study? Title – High School Experiences of Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Young Adults.

Yes

No

Prefer Not

If yes, please provide your phone number and email address.

Phone Number_____

Email _____

APPENDIX D

QUESTIONNAIRE

https://snhu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_2sfK90Ttk536UoB

Informed Consent

I agree to participate in this research study. The purpose of this study is to (1) clarify and document the needs and reflective experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming youth; (2) determine the extent to which schools and federal, state, and local policies are meeting those needs; and (3) utilize input from participants in support of school, community and policy changes. I understand the purpose and nature of this study and I am participating voluntarily. I understand that all of my answers will be kept confidential. I also grant permission for the data generated from this questionnaire to be used in the researcher's dissertation on this topic.

☐ Yes

☐ No

Age

☐ 18- 20

☐ 21- 26

☐ 26 - older

Do you consider yourself a part of the LGBTQ community?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Prefer not to say

Which of the following do you most closely associate with?

☐ Transgender

☐ Gender Creative

☐ Parent

☐ Ally

☐ Prefer not to say

What type of high school did you attend?

- ☐ Private
- ☐ Public
- ☐ Charter
- ☐ Other

In what state was your high school located?

Did your high school respond swiftly and fairly to incidents of discrimination, harassment or bullying based on gender identity and expression? Please explain?

Did the faculty and staff members in your school respect and honor students' gender identity, expression and use the students preferred pronouns? Please explain?

Did LGBTQ students in your school experience discrimination in their dealings with high school administration, faculty and staff? Please explain?

Do you think that high school humanities curriculum should include LGBTQ history and texts/books? Please explain.

What do you think schools can do to become more inclusive? Please explain.

Would you be interested in being contacted for additional information?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Click to write the question text

APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Part I: Information Sheet

Name(s) of principal Investigator(s) – Bernadette Weltsek

Title of Study - High School Experiences of Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Young Adults: A Reflective Photovoice Study

This informed consent form is for transgender and gender non-conforming youth between the ages of 18 -20 who have volunteered to participate in the research study titled High School Experiences of Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Young Adults: A Reflective Photovoice Study.

My name is Bernadette Weltsek, I am a doctoral candidate at Southern New Hampshire University. I am doing research on the experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming youth. I am going to provide you with a demographic survey and invite you to be part of this research. You do not have to decide today whether or not you will participate in the research. This consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask me to stop as we go through the information and I will take time to explain. If you have questions later, you can ask them of me.

The purpose of this study is to (1) clarify and document the needs and reflective experiences of transgender and gender nonconforming youth; (2) determine the extent to which schools and federal, state, local and school policies are meeting those needs; and (3) utilize input from participants in support of school, community and policy changes. I will utilize the qualitative research methodology of photovoice and aspects of phenomenology which will allow participants to tell their high school stories through photography and personal reflective experiences. The photos and subsequent interviews will be used to help implement changes in existing policies and practices, as well as to draw attention to transgender and gender non-conforming student experiences. By highlighting the lived experiences and issues facing our transgender and gender non-conforming youth, my hope is to showcase the need for change in our schools. This study may contribute to our understanding of all marginalized students.

This research will involve your participation in taking and/or sharing a minimum of 25 photographs that reflect your high school experience. You will also be asked to take part in two to three interviews that will take about one and a half hours each

You are being invited to take part in this research because of your answers on the original survey where you stated you are transgender or gender non-conforming and were interested in taking part in this study.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. It is your choice whether to participate or not.

We are asking you to help us learn more about the high school experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming youth in your community. I am inviting you to take part in this research project. If you accept, you will be asked to take or share 25 photographs that reflect your high school experience. You will also be asked to take part in a maximum of three interviews. During the interview process you will be asked to discuss your high school experience and talk about the photographs and how they reflect your time in high school. The interviews will take place about a week apart for a total time commitment of about 7 -8 hours including the time needed to take photographs.

I will be asking you to share with us some personal and confidential information about your high school experiences, and you may feel uncomfortable talking about some of the topics. You do not have to answer any question or take part in the interview if you don't wish to do so, and that is fine. You do not have to give us any reason for not responding to any question, or for refusing to take part in the interview.

There will be no direct benefit to you, but your participation is likely to help us find out more about the high school experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming youth.

You will not be provided any incentive to take part in the research.

I will not be sharing information about you to anyone. The information that I collect from this research project will be kept private. Any information about you will have a number on it instead of your name. I will be the only person who will know what your number is, and I will lock that information up with a lock and key. It will not be shared with or given to anyone.

Nothing that you tell me today will be shared with anybody, and nothing will be attributed to you by name. The knowledge that I get from this research will be shared with you before it is made widely available to the public. Each participant will receive a summary of the results. There will also be small exhibits of the photographs in the community and these will be announced. Following the exhibits, I will publish the results so that other interested people may learn from the research.

You do not have to take part in this research if you do not wish to do so and choosing to participate will not affect you in any way. You may stop participating in the interviews at any time that you wish. I will give you an opportunity at the end of each interview to review your remarks, and you can ask to modify or remove portions of those, if you do not agree with my notes or if I did not understand you correctly

If you have any questions, you can ask them now or later. If you wish to ask questions later, you may contact me:

Bernadette Weltsek
bernadette.weltsek@snhu.edu
631-872-0652

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by Southern New Hampshire University, which is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm. If you wish to find out more about the IRB, contact irb@snhu.edu.

Part II: Certificate of Consent

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked to have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Print Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____
Day/month/year

If illiterate ¹

I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form to the potential participant, and the individual has had the opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the individual has given consent freely.

Print name of witness _____

Signature of witness _____

Date _____
Day/month/year

Statement by the researcher/person taking consent

I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant, and to the best of my ability made sure that the participant understands the benefits and risks of the study.

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

A copy of this ICF has been provided to the participant.

Print Name of Researcher/person taking the consent _____

¹ A literate witness must sign (if possible, this person should be selected by the participant and should have no connection to the research team).

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent _____

Date _____

Day/month/year

Consent to audio record interviews

Study Title-High School Experiences of Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Young Adults: A Reflective Photovoice Study

This informed consent form is for transgender and gender non-conforming youth between the ages of 18 -20 who have volunteered to participate in the research study titled High School Experiences of Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Young Adults: A Reflective Photovoice Study.

Consent

I, _____ (print name), agree to participate in this research project entitled, *High School Experiences of Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Young Adults: A Reflective Photovoice Study*. I have had the study explained to me by Bernadette Weltsek and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have read the description of the study and give my consent to participate. I understand that I will receive a copy of this informed consent form to keep for future reference.

To the best of my knowledge, I meet the criteria for participation in this study.

Participant's Signature

Date

Permission to audio record interviews?

____ YES ____ NO

(Please check one)

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher Contact Information

Bernadette Weltsek

631-872-0652

Bernadette.weltsek@snhu.edu

APPENDIX F

PHOTOGRAPHY CONSENT FORM

Study Title

High School Experiences of Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Young Adults: A Reflective Photovoice Study

I, _____ (print name), give permission to be photographed by participants of this research project entitled *High School Experiences of Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Young Adults: A Reflective Photovoice Study*. I have had the study explained to me and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I will receive a copy of this informed consent document to keep for future reference.

Individual's Signature

Date

For Participant/Photographer's Use Only:

Photograph number(s) in which this individual appears:

Researcher Contact Information

Bernadette Weltsek

631-872-0652

bernadette.weltsek@snhu.edu

APPENDIX G

PHOTOGRAPH RELEASE FORM

Photographs of you will not be taken, presented, exhibited, or otherwise published without your consent and release.

Photograph Release

Photographs of you will not be taken, presented, exhibited, or otherwise published without your consent and release.

Photographs

You will receive a copy of the photo(s) in which you appear. The photo(s) will be provided to you by the participant. Any photographs you receive may not be uploaded to social media sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat) or otherwise be published online or in any other format by you.

Statement of Release

I, _____ (print name), irrevocably grant to Bernadette Weltsek, the right to use the photographs taken of me for any purpose she deems appropriate in perpetuity. I understand that these photographs may appear in various publications such as scholarly journal articles or conference presentations.

I understand that no real names will accompany the photographs published in association with study. However, I understand that I may be identifiable through the photograph.

I expressly release Bernadette Weltsek, Southern New Hampshire University and their agents, trustees, officers, employees, licensees, and assigns from and against any and all claims which I have or may have for invasion of privacy, defamation or any other cause of action arising out of or relating to my appearance in the photographs.

I assure that the photograph(s) I appear in, which will be provided to me by the participant/photographer, will not appear on social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat) or otherwise be published online or in any other format.

Date

Photo Subjects Name (Please Print)

Photo Subjects Signature

APPENDIX H

PHOTOGRAPHS

You will receive copies of the photographs you have taken. The photo(s) will be provided to you by the researcher. Any photographs you receive may not appear on social media sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram) or otherwise be published online or in any format by you.

Statement of Release

I, the undersigned, irrevocably grant to Bernadette Weltsek, the right to use the photographs taken of me for any purpose she deems proper in perpetuity. I understand that these photographs may appear in various publications such as scholarly articles or conference presentations.

I understand that no real names will accompany the photographs published in association with study. However, I understand that I may be identifiable through the photographs.

I expressly release Bernadette Weltsek, Southern New Hampshire University and their agents, trustees, officers, employees, licensees, and assigns from and against any and all claims which I have or may have for invasion of privacy, defamation or any other cause of action arising out of or relating to my appearance in the photographs.

I assure that the photograph(s) I appear in, which will be provided to me by the participant/photographer, will not appear on social media sites (eg. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat) or otherwise be published online or in any other format.

Indicate permission to publish photograph(s) with an “x” in the space provided below.

_____ All photos (1 – 25)

_____ 1	_____ 6	_____ 11	_____ 16	_____ 21
_____ 2	_____ 7	_____ 12	_____ 17	_____ 22
_____ 3	_____ 8	_____ 13	_____ 18	_____ 23
_____ 4	_____ 9	_____ 14	_____ 19	_____ 24
_____ 5	_____ 10	_____ 15	_____ 20	_____ 25

Date

Signature

Print Name

APPENDIX I

INTERVIEW #1 PROTOCOL

Interview questions to be utilized during the first interview:

- What do you see in this photo?
- What is happening here and what does it mean to you?
- Describe your photo?
- Why did you take this photo?
- What does this photo tell us about your high school experience?

APPENDIX J

INTERVIEW #2 PROTOCOL

Interview questions to be utilized during interview two:

- Did your school respond swiftly and fairly to incidents of discrimination, harassment or bullying based on gender identity and expression?
- Did the faculty and staff members in your school respect and honor students' gender identity and expression and used the pronouns the student prefers? Explain?
- How are teachers perceived by transgender individuals?
- Do transgender, transitioning and gender nonconforming students experience heterosexism (discrimination) in their dealings with high school administration, faculty, and staff?
- Can schools meet the needs of transitioning, transgender and gender nonconforming students?
- Did you feel safe in school? Why?
- Do you think teachers are meeting the educational needs of transitioning, transgender and gender nonconforming students?

What would you have liked your teachers to know?

What would you have liked to learn about in high school?

APPENDIX K

INTERVIEW #3 PROTOCOL

The following questions will be used during interview three:

- What was being part of this project like?
- Who were you thinking about when you took these photographs? Why?
- How do these photographs represent your high school experiences?
- How did you decide what to photograph?
- Was the project difficult for you? Why or why not?
- What was it like for you to talk about your images?

What would you like administrators, teachers and communities know?

APPENDIX L

PHOTOGRAPHS



#Friends

“ Even after I came out, I still hid and ran. I was afraid of people (mostly my family and close friends). But they all saved me. They let me know it was okay to fulfill my destiny and be who I was born to be.”



A speed bump can feel like a mountain until you climb over it, right?

- “Mental health is so very important. And I’m thankful to the people that genuinely check in on me, the people who don’t act like all I am is a transition. Everything is not okay all of the time. Everything is temporary & that’s the beauty of life. A speed bump can feel like a mountain until you climb over it, right?”



“I’m done with hiding.”

“In my own life I’ve been running from just about everything. My faith, family, my realities, being transgender. Even after I came out, I still hid an ran”



Just Talk

"I think that the problem is we have to talk about issues that people are afraid to talk about, LGBTQ people, people of color, people with disabilities, all the minorities before taking care of those individual issues with harassment."





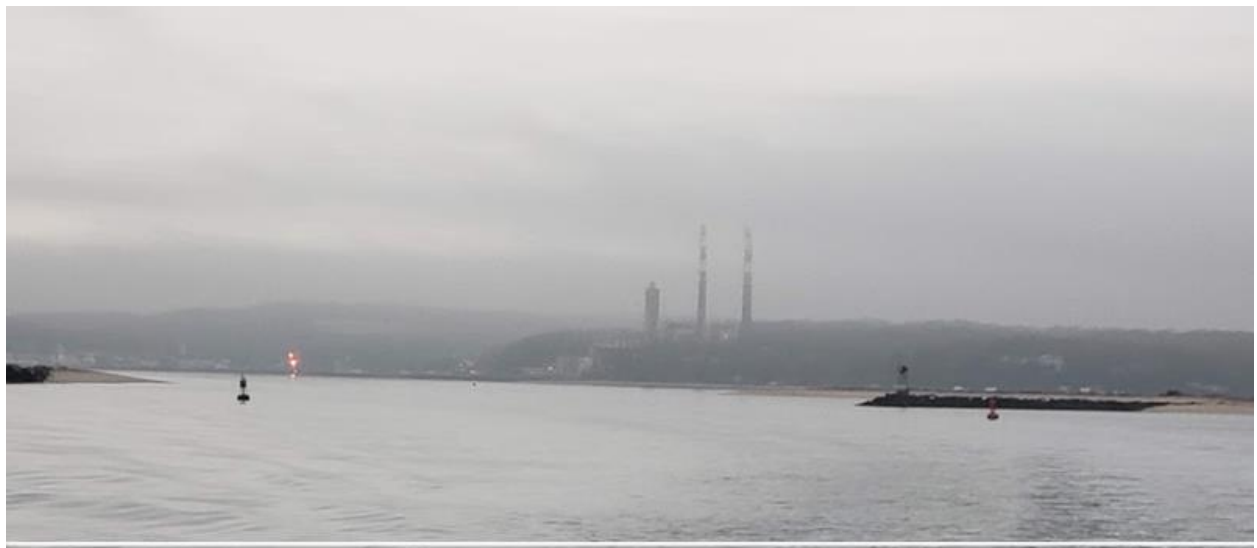
Finding ourselves.

Taking a knee,
all lives matter.

If you don't stand for the pledge you are labeled a trouble maker and you are silenced. I sit for those who face adversity.



The Fog is Lifting



Weathering the Storm



The Unexpected

June, 2016

Given the number of unexpected complications and difficulties in my transition, it was hard to revel in the unexpected victories like getting my license. Driving was one of my most prominently negative experiences due to my gender identity. Being able to drive on my own was one of the few parts of high school that felt "normal" and helped me gain the independence I needed.



The Trapped Inside

I came across this sculpture at Grounds for Sculpture in NJ. I saw this woman chiseling away at her male exterior in a cage. While my experience has been the reverse (ie: man chiseling away at a female exterior...) I identified with it. The feeling of being trapped both within yourself and with the world.

Trapped Man

This is also from Grounds for Sculpture in NJ. I identified with this image. The man looks like he was drowning, but in a place where drowning should not happen. That was how it felt in high school, like I was drowning where everyone else walked.



"I was always going to feel this sad until I either died of natural causes or I killed myself."

Death at a young age

“When I transitioned all these people disappeared from my life. I was no longer welcomed in certain circles.”

**The people
left behind.**



Here lies my
former self.



Drag

I was most confident in drag. There were times I would just go home and dress in drag so I could feel normal.



Darkness



Sadness was pretty constant in my teens. There was no rhyme or reason- I had friends, I had a loving family, I got good grades, I played sports. I was depressed for so long I honestly believed this was just how I was going to feel for the rest of my life. That I would forever be plagued with sadness until I ended it or died of natural causes.



He is simply a boy in a dress

This was taken at a dance in St. Elizabeth's all girls catholic college. This picture looks uncomfortable, because it is. When I realized I was a boy the world did not. Though I started to shape my life around being a boy, I was often forced back into feminine gender roles. It was worse than when I was confused because I now knew it was wrong. I was still blamed for the discomfort- (if you wore makeup, grew out your hair, did your nails then maybe it would feel right). But no matter what I did, I would always just be a boy in a dress.

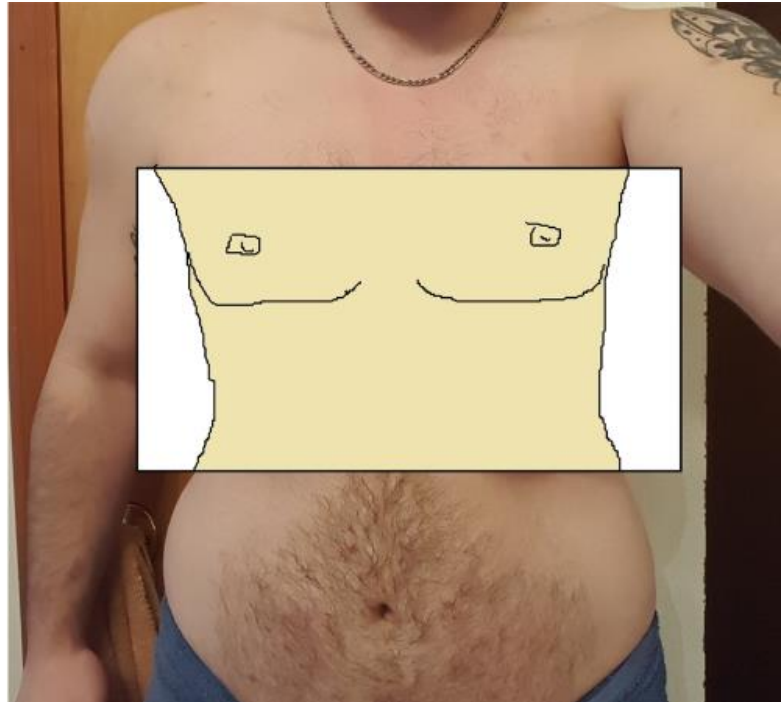
Its about the D

This was taken in a store in Salem, Mass. Throughout history men marvel at their penises. When you're a transman you have to wrap your head around the reality that you will never have a biological penis. Sure you can have surgery, but it won't function like a biological penis. It's a huge part of being a male that we miss out on. It's hard, no matter the age, to get to the place where we recognize that not having a penis does not mean we are any less of a man...



Reflections

Reminders that my body did not match my internal sense of self were hard. Mirrors, pictures, but also the way people responded. In my head I had a flat chest, in reality I did not. If I wanted people to respond to me like I man I had to present that way, which mean a binder. Which meant trouble breathing, pain, sweating, back acne... if I wanted to be good psychologically and not be in pain daily I needed surgery. Otherwise, The picture in my head did not match the mirror.



Impossible Decision



In retrospect, I always felt like there were two halves of myself in high school. The me inside and the me other people wanted me to be. I didn't know which was better or worse. I didn't want to lose my friends or my family. I wanted a career, a partner, an education. If I didn't have those things but was "myself" could I still be happy? I knew that no matter what I choose there was a risk I would just be miserable. Either miserable not being who I was inside or miserable losing everything else I valued in my life... It was an impossible decision

“I’m done with
hiding.”

“In my own life I’ve been running
from just about everything. My faith,
family, my realities, being
transgender. Even after I came out, I
still hid an ran”



“Everything is
temporary and that’s
the beauty of life.”

Appendix M

Facebook Post

As many of you know, I am a doctoral candidate beginning the work on my dissertation. I am looking for individuals 18 years and older who are willing to fill out an anonymous survey. Participation in this survey may help in understanding the high school experiences of LGBTQ young adults. I want to hear about the experiences you had in high school. Your responses will remain anonymous. No one will be able to identify you or your answers, and no one will know if you or those you share the survey with participated in the study. The last question on the survey asks for anyone interested in participating further in the research. Again, participation is voluntary, but it will allow me to contact those individuals who are willing to leave their contact information for further inquiry. I am very excited and appreciate your willingness to complete the survey and share it with others who may be interested and want to share their experiences. Just click on the link below.

Thank you for your help.

Bernadette Tranchida Weltsek

Appendix N

Recent Articles

Bergen, K., Two JoCo districts add protections for gay and transgender students and teachers.

Kansas City Star. March 11, 2019.

<https://www.kansascity.com/news/local/article227312744.html>

Crary, D., (2019) Equality Act Faces Lack of GOP Support Upon Being Reintroduced In Congress. March 13, 2019. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/equality-act-lgbtq-rights-congress_n_5c8941cce4b038892f49cfd

Gerth, J., Kentucky teacher came out as bisexual to stop a student's suicide. Then he got fired.

Louisville Courier Journal. February 21, 2019.

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/02/21/kentucky-teacher-comes-out-bisexual-lgbt-and-gets-fired/2942282002/>

Jaspan, J. (2019) Trans Eating Disorders Are All but ignored by Medical Community. The

Advocate. March 12, 2019. <https://www.advocate.com/commentary/2019/3/12/trans-eating-disorders-are-all-ignored-medical-community>

Kay, M. (2019) School Board in Virginia may end transgender bathroom ban. Washington

Blade. Watermark Online. February 19, 2019

<http://www.watermarkonline.com/2019/02/19/school-board-in-virginia-may-end-transgender-bathroom-ban/>

Lang, N., (2019) Illinois Could Become the Third State to Teach LGBTQ History in Schools.

<http://www.newnownext.com/illinois-could-teach-lgbtq-history-in-k-12-schools/03/2019/>

Lyons, J., (2019) Tennessee Has Seen 12 Anti-LGBTQ Bills Introduced Already In 2019 & It's

Only March. <https://www.bustle.com/p/tennessee-has-seen-12-anti-lgbtq-bills-introduced-already- in-2019-its-only-march-16811294>

Meehan, E. (2019) LGBT Foundation speaks up for LGBT inclusive education for all school Children. LGBT Foundation. March 20, 2019. <https://lgbt.foundation/news/lgbt-foundation-speaks-up-for-lgbt-inclusive-education-for-all-school-children/278>

Neal, B. (2019) Bisexual Youth Health Statistics Show How Bi Teens Need More Mental Health Support, A New Report Shows. Bustle. <https://www.bustle.com/p/bisexual-youth-health-statistics-show-how-bi-teens-need-more-mental-health-support-a-new-report-shows-16983571>

Ring, T., (2019) South Dakota moves to ban discussion of trans identity in schools. The Advocate. February 13, 2019. <https://www.advocate.com/transgender/2019/2/13/south-dakota-moves-ban-discussion-trans-identity-schools>

Skarin, L., (2019) The South Dakota Legislature's Transphobia. February 7, 2019. <https://www.aclu.org/blog/lgbt-rights/transgender-rights/south-dakota-legislatures-transphobia>

West Virginia assistant principal accused of harassing trans boy loses job. (2019) the Charleston Gazette-Mail, <http://wvgazettemail.com>.

Winslow, B., & Thomas, E. (2019) LGBTQ rights activists stage sit-in, get apology from Utah's governor over conversion therapy ban bill. March 7, 2019. <https://fox13now.com/2019/03/07/lgbtq-rights-activists-stage-sit-in-get-apology-from-utahs-governor-over-conversion-therapy-ban-bill/>

Wong, Curtis (2019) Transgender Teen Wins Gender-Neutral Prom Title After Being

Told He Can't Run for King. Huff Post, March 26, 2019.

<https://www.advocate.com/commentary/2019/3/12/trans-eating-disorders-are-all-ignored-medical-community>

Appendix O

Resources

- NCTE and GLSEN’s Model School Policy, which includes policies that schools can adopt to support trans students

https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/images/resources/trans_school_district_model_policy_FINAL.pdf

- *Schools in Transition*, a practical guide to help school officials address issues affecting trans students

<https://www.genderspectrum.org/staging/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Schools-in-Transition-2015.pdf>

- This FAQ on trans students and restrooms, which addresses common questions school officials may have about restroom access. It is endorsed and supported by the American School Counselor Association, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Association of School Psychologists, and the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

<https://www.genderspectrum.org/BathroomFAQ/>

- Lambda Legal's Safe Havens: Closing the Gap Between Recommend Practice and Reality for Transgender and Gender-Expansive Youth in Out-of-Home Care, a comprehensive analysis of the troubling lack of explicit laws and policies in most states to protect transgender, gender-expansive and gender non-conforming (TGNC) youth in the child welfare, juvenile justice, and runaway and homeless youth systems (“out-of-home care systems”).

<https://www.lambdalegal.org/publications/safe-havens>

- NCTE's FAQ explaining what the Trump administration's decision to overturn the Title IX guidance means.

<https://transequality.org/issues/resources/faq-on-the-withdrawal-of-federal-guidance-on-transgender-students>

Key Resources from U.S. Department of Education

- Federal guidance on respecting trans students. This letter, which went out to schools around the country, says that trans students should be treated according to their gender identity, including when it comes to names and pronouns, dress codes, and restrooms. While the Departments of Justice and Education have now withdrawn the guidance document, you can still give it to your school to show them examples of what supportive policies look like.

<http://www.transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/sac/01%20colleague-201605-title-ix-transgender.pdf>

- Examples of supportive policies from the Department of Education. These examples show different approaches schools across the country have taken across a range of issues, and it has not been rolled back.

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oese/oshs/emergingpractices.pdf>

- Federal guidance on bullying and harassment, including gender-based and anti-transgender bullying. This guidance from the Department of Education *has not* been rolled back.

<http://www.transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/sac/06%20colleague-201010.pdf>