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Transgender Research Part A and B

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Part A: Transgender Research, 2018

(The writer was 20 years old when writing this section) In life we all must face hardships of some kind or another. Some of the challenges are big and some are small, but the biggest struggle that people face is the struggle to be themselves. This is something that everyone can relate to on some level and everyone faces this hardship differently. But the people who face the most prejudice for this are transgender people. These people face so much harassment and discrimination every day, but we usually never hear anything about it, because they are viewed and treated like they are not real people in American society. Transgender people are still people and I wanted to understand the struggles they go through living in America and what is being done to help them live a normal life, because as of now transgender people are treated with prejudice and discrimination that makes them feel like they do not matter.

I wanted to understand the risks transgender people deal with compared to cisgender people and the first piece of research I found was an article written by Susan Milligan titled "Isolated and Left Behind". In it Milligan writes about transgender inequality and the higher risks they face in their daily lives. She interviewed transgender people in Las Vegas and asked about the challenges they face. For example, someone she interviewed listed off some of the big risks trans people face and they said, "Family rejection leads to increased homelessness. Fear of being openly transgender makes it difficult to find a job and discourages transgender victims of crime from going to the police. Unemployment leads to more homelessness and with it, danger of sexual assault on the streets. Frequent harassment, public ridicule and ongoing isolation from family fuels anxiety and suicidal tendencies." (1). This shows you some of the hardships that come with being transgendered. They are at higher risk for suicide, unemployment, harassment, and sexual assault just for being themselves. This is something that cisgender people don't face as much because according to society cisgender is the "normal" thing to be.

Researching the treatment of transgender people lead me to many studies of transphobia and the effects it has on trans people and their mental health. According to a study conducted by Elliot A. Tebbe and Bonnie Moradi titled "Suicide Risk in Trans Populations: An Application of Minority Stress Theory" they wanted to find out if suicide risk was higher for transgender people by using the "Minority Stress Theory" (MST). The MST is described as "posits that sociocultural prejudice and discrimination promotes minority stressors that can have deleterious mental health implications for members of minority populations." (521) They also looked at the "General Population Risk factors" too. They said, "In addition to considering minority stressors, it is important to consider general risk factors for suicide. Empirical data and theories of suicide point to depression and substance use as important risk factors." (521) The process they used for this study involved a sample size of 335 people who identified as trans and multiple factors linked to suicide. According to Tebbe and Moradi 68.5% of the sample was diagnosed with depression which was higher than previous samples that ranged from about 48% to 60% (529). "They also said, "Regarding suicide, 71.9% of the sample reported that they had thought about suicide in the last year, while 28.1% of the sample reported having attempted suicide at least once in their lifetime. Of those who attempted suicide, the modal number of attempts was two. Moreover, 20.5% of participants indicated that it was "likely" or "very likely" that they would attempt suicide at some point in the future." (529). Suicide was one of the biggest risks that trans people face because of transphobic actions and hate. I found another study that covered the feelings of trans people who kept their identity a secret. This study was written by, Liam Timmins, Katharine A. Rimes et al and it was titled "Minority Stressors and Psychological Distress in Transgender Individuals". This study covered the psychological distress of transphobia and minority stressors to people who are not openly transgender. The results of this study were interesting because they said, "One possible explanation is that masking one's minority status could protect transgender individuals from external stressors that are not explicitly prejudicial, thus resulting in less rumination and distress (but not suicidality)." (336). The reason I found this interesting is because transgender people have the option of hiding their minority status which would make life easier, but

they would still deal with issues like depression and suicide. They would still deal with these issues because they are denied the opportunity to be themselves and this can have many negative effects on a person mind transgender or not.

Another challenge transgender people face is adopting a child and starting a family. In a study by Brittany A. Weiner and Leah Zinner titled "Attitudes Toward Straight, Gay Male, and Transsexual Parenting" They look at how a transphobic attitude effects the perception of transgender parents and their emotional stability. (327). It's not fair to just draw conclusions about people based on their name or what they look like. If a transgender couple wants to adopt a kid and love them unconditionally, let them. They can't be considered unqualified to be a parent just because they're transgender. In this article they say that this emotional stability discrimination could be based on current research showing that transgender people have a higher attempted suicide rate than straight people or gay people. (333). Also, the authors said, "we find that transsexual parents face greater prejudice and discrimination than their nontraditional counterparts. These findings are in line with research indicating that the transsexual population generally experiences more violence and discrimination than the lesbian and gay population" (335). This is true because many studies have been done on the discrimination of trans people and most of them prove that transgender people face more discrimination than gay people. Which causes people to assume that they are emotionally unstable, and they could not raise a child as a transgender individual.

Even though transgender people are probably one of the most oppressed minorities in America there are programs and safe spaces being implemented to help them feel comfortable in their own skin. In an article written by Nicholas C. Heck et al titled "Piloting a Psychotherapy Group for Transgender Clients: Description and Clinical Considerations for Practitioners" he talks about group therapy sessions with transgender individuals and how it helped them feel comfortable with themselves. This study is mainly aimed at psychologists and it aims to inform them about treating a transgender person. The article discusses issues like coming out and transitioning. This should show you that there is something being done to help these people. This article provided many guidelines to follow when helping a transgender person and a specific

one was this, “Sometimes role-plays were used to help group members practice coming out. Group members were able to observe how subtle changes in verbal and body language might reduce conflict, disarm defensiveness, and/or deepen a connection.” (34). This study can effectively give transgender people emotional tools that can help them in life and it can help psychiatrists understand the general issues trans people go through. This will help the transgender population by teaching doctors about the challenges trans people face and leading to a better understanding for them.

A big problem that transgender people have is the issue of getting health insurance. This is explained in a study written by Lore M. Dickey et al and it is titled, “Health Disparities in the Transgender Community: Exploring Differences in Insurance Coverage” where she explains the trials that trans people go through to get health insurance. It’s another case of transphobia and discrimination because, the end results of this test proved that transgender people have less health care coverage compared to cisgender people (279). An interesting point that was brought up in the article had to do with location and insurance. What they found is that places like San Francisco and New York City have more transgender people with healthcare and they say, “Findings from the current study indicate a greater need to assess health insurance coverage across the United States, rather than primarily focusing on cities that may provide better resources (e.g., San Francisco and New York City). Previous research indicated that location can have a substantial impact on LGBT individuals in terms of family relationships, quality of life, homophobia/transphobia, and equal rights.” (279). This wasn’t surprising to me at all because California seems like the most open-minded state when it comes to gender and sexuality. But many other places in America aren’t that accepting of transgender people. Which is why this study focused on the results of rural America or the areas that don’t have as many resources as the big cities.

Recently graduating high school, I can tell you that people are not very accepting of you if you’re different. I couldn’t even begin to imagine the challenges a transgender youth must face in a high school setting. However, there are things being done to help them feel like they belong and provide a place where they can safely learn. In high schools they are creating these programs called “Gay-Straight Alliances” or GSA. I

learned about this by reading about a study done on GSA+ schools and GSA- schools written by Nicholas C. Heck et al titled "Offsetting Risks: High School Gay-Straight Alliances and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Youth". Heck talked about the affects this program had on LGBT youth and he found that GSA+ schools were more inclusive than GSA- schools. They said that, "As predicted, GSA+ youth reported more school belonging and less at-school victimization because of their sexual orientation when compared to GSA- youth." (87). And "Additionally, GSA+ youth reported more favorable outcomes related to alcohol use, depression, and general psychological distress." (87). This shows the positive effect of providing a safe space for transgender individuals. It helps them feel more included and more human when they have a place where they are treated as equals compared to a place that acts like they don't exist.

In conclusion I believe that transgender people are treated like they are less than human just because of their gender identity. It causes many problems for them including higher suicide risks, less opportunities, and the lack of living a normal life. They are horribly mistreated by people and they are usually shunned or cast out by the people that they are closest to, but in recent years they have made great strides in being seen and being heard. People are finally providing places for them to feel safe as themselves. In high schools they have the GSA for trans youth and they have group therapy sessions for trans adults. They have a long way to go but I feel like they are on the right path to being treated as equals.

Part B: 2020, A Brighter Future During Tough Times

Now I return to this topic a bit over two years later and incase you, the reader hasn't lived through this shitstorm of a year allow me to give you a quick rundown of how it's played out up to November 11th. The world is currently in the middle of a pandemic that has put the world on pause, ex-president Trump tried to send civil rights back around 60 years but thankfully failed, and I am writing this part on the verge of a mental breakdown because now I'm in HSU Zoom university and not Solano Community College. Also part B of this paper will highlight the developments that have happened since 2018. Also a little warning for you this paper is being written for a class

that will (hopefully) publish it so keep in mind that the writer is a 22 year old cis white male. I do not claim to understand the struggles that transgender people or any minority goes through, but I would love to see a day where these misrepresented individuals have the same privileges as me.

Now that you understand the mind of the writer a bit the next section will be about being transgender in 2020 compared to 2018 as seen from my eyes. First thing, to anyone reading this who is transgender, in the verge of transitioning, or is questioning what their identity is understand that it is still a challenge during 2020 for you all to receive a fair chance for opportunity in the United States, but progress is being made. For example, "In the 2020 general election, voters elected six transgender candidates to state office," This is information from an NPR article titled, "Trans And Nonbinary Candidates Set Record Wins In Red And Blue States" written by Piper McDaniel and David Garcia. This is a huge win for the entire LGBTQ+ community and it gives many people hope for the future of America where you can be whoever you want and make something of yourself through hard work and constant effort.

Now this brings me to the current representation of transgender individuals in the media because some of it is good and some of it is bad. However in the realm of video games I've noticed that in newer games that have character customization and player choice there is usually a non-binary option or a trans option. The reason I wanted to highlight this specifically is because it should show you that these companies that make these games want to give everyone the chance to play as a hero that represents them and it can help people who play these games understand that these people exist too. One game that does this well is Ubisoft's Assassin's Creed Valhalla which allows you to change the players gender at anytime or just chose a non-binary option. Which shows me and many other people that the voice of a community is being heard by many people. Now I know I didn't cover bad representation because it's already been seen for years in tv movies and many other outlets. Most of it never acknowledged the existence of trans individuals.

Overall I wanted to keep this paper the same as I wrote it 2 years ago but I wanted to add hopeful news because this year has been mostly bad and I just wanted to write something that could make someone smile. Transgender individuals have made incredible progress when it comes to the rights they have and being seen as human. This is not something to scoff at and it's definitely not something to laugh at because these people fought like hell against a system that held all the cards for far more than just two years. So what do I want you to understand after reading this? Simple, even if you don't understand everyone's situations or decisions they're still human so don't be shitty towards someone just because they're different to you. Instead realize that we all face hardships in one way or another but the biggest hurdle in life is just trying to be yourself especially when the system you live under doesn't want people like you to exist.

In closing I'll leave you with a quote, "Knowing that we can be loved exactly as we are gives us all the best opportunity for growing into the healthiest of people."- Mr. Rogers.

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