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Trans in SCV

Abstract

This paper uses a mixture of qualitative interviews given to transgender students within College of the Canyons alongside a survey conducted chronicling students' experiences of various personal metrics and finally conducting a quantitative survey for the school's transgender day of visibility event. What was found were intra-community conflicts that stem from a mixture of transnormativity and attempts to reconcile prior medicalization of transness, common outlooks on the apatheticness or outright apologia from cisgender people in the face of transphobia, and the solidarity of building common in-person and online communities by and for transgender people.

Positionality Statement

Before presenting the findings, I believe it is important to disclose that I am an American-Panamanian student at College of the Canyons who identifies as non-binary. Alongside this all participants were/are part of the college's Transgender Alliance and anyone cited from any research done by me will be cited by the animal voluntarily disclosed to me by the participant. It is of upmost importance that I disclose this information as it influenced my choosing of the subject matter of the paper.

Methods

The methods used to sample were mixed the first was a qualitative interview-style survey of the expected 20 responses it received 18 unique responses, the only demographic data gained through this was the fact that all participants in some shape or form identified as *transgender*. In this case, transgender is defined using the following definition “Gender incongruence is

characterised by a marked and persistent incongruence between an individual's experienced gender and the assigned sex." (ICD 11). All participants in the study were recorded by handing out a copy to the College of the Canyons Transgender Alliance Faculty lead where clicking the link would allow the participant to take the survey of their own volition. Those who weren't comfortable participating in the survey took a qualitative in-person interview instead. The participants can be described as members of the school's transgender alliance, and those quoted are going under an alias. What was measured throughout were the participants' definitions of the term transgender and why their minds gravitate towards certain conceptions of gender (i.e. What does being transgender mean to you?), alongside this was their documentation of transgender culture with "culture" being defined as either online spaces where various people come to congregate and share miscellaneous media and self-made or republished digital artifacts and in-person spaces where people meet face to face and share commonly held beliefs and values in a shared space public or private, and the last is the chronicling of an experience that a participant had where a non-transgender person responded to or gave lack thereof a response to transphobia, with "transphobia" being defined as any practice which seeks to degrade or harm a person based on the perception of being identified as transgender or leveraging power over another person for not aligning with a strict understanding of gender norms.

Findings

After around 3 months, what was found through the collected responses was a mixture of intra-community conflicts on what it means to be transgender and how transphobia should be tackled, alongside how culture is created and defined in-person and online for transgender individuals. Take for instance participant *Guinea Pig* who identified transphobia in the following manner: "Identifying as cats, zi/zir, xi/xir, or xeno/neogenders. It mocks transgenders and is the

face of transphobia. It's like blackface but for the transgender community. Being Tucute, in itself, is transphobic and they are not transgenders.”. However despite this participant giving an outlier response many others identified experiences to counter transphobia and further stratification such as the participant *Wolf* who wrote the following:

“If you're talking about the average person who tries to be.. supportive of trans people then I'd say due to their unchecked biases, they try to sometimes justify transphobia or downplay its severity. [...] a transgender person being a victim of a hate crime and losing their life because of it (i.e. Nex Benedict), I've noticed a lot less attempts to justify any actions and the cisgender person to be outraged to some degree that something like that was able to happen. [...] They can understand how the loss of life is upsetting (albeit the media usually tries to paint hate crime victims of ‘deserving it’ somehow due to things in their personal lives, which in turn makes these people who could've been sympathetic to the victim suddenly view them much more black and white and harder to sympathize with.”

This shows a conflict that research on transgender individuals does not go over very much, the brawl of strict transmedicalism versus the social construction of gender. In this case, both *Guinea Pig* and *Wolf* present opposite sides of transgender cultural understanding of gender with *Guinea Pig* representing the more reactionary position of transness is defined by ones experience of pain in relation to gender incongruence, in line with Harry Benjamin's 1966 *Sexual Orientation Scale* defining the lowest point as “Psuedo-Transvestite's” and the highest point being “True Transsexuals” a now outdated medical definition of transgender identity that did not consider how socialization, cultural upbringing, and other environmental systems build ones subjective understanding of gender.

However, on the alternative exists the social construction of gender identity which is more in line with modern understanding of gender which can range from Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity to Kate Borenstien's post-modernist view of gender being a paradox that even when isolated cannot be separated from other intersecting social categories like that race and disability, as similarly quoted by *Wolf's* quotation mentioned above.

Discussion

Branching off from the findings, however, we see what these clashing philosophies are in practice. Take for instance the interview with Pau González from Hombres Trans Panamá (Trans Men Panama) Gonzalez describes the protocols that are enforced when attempting to transition in Panama: "For gender marker change I decided to wait to have my name changed to then request gender marker change. I presented all my paperwork, and they gave me a document stating I needed to have a medical exam in the National Forensics Legal Medical office by law. [...] they require people to go in a physical exam where they would check their genitals to then determine if the person is male or female" (Gonzalez, 2022). This policy which is required by law in Panama is what it takes to get sex reassignment surgery, hormone replacement therapy, and changing of gender markers on official government documents. This is the transmedicalist philosophy when taken to its logical conclusion as to do even the basic measures of affirming one's identity require one to fit a strict medical definition of transness based on outdated notions of binary sex-based characteristics, alongside this is the fact that Panama recognizes no options for non-binary gender identities. This is particularly significant due to similar political legislation and rhetoric being employed within the United States targeting all ages alongside targeting the protections given to transgender individuals throughout the US. However, this ties into additional

findings from conducting a quantitative survey on the 28th of April at College of the Canyons during the Transgender Day of Visibility event, according to the 8 respondents who voluntarily took the survey 75.00% were very excited about attending (7 respondents), 12.50% were excited (1 respondent), and another 12.50 were very unexcited (1 respondent). Alongside this 87.50 (7 respondents) want the event to happen again next year while 12.50% (1 respondent) disagree. What this shows is the importance of community both online and in-person as going back to the survey shows an overwhelming amount of participants within this study cited College of The Canyons Transgender Alliance as an important space where feel safe and welcome on campus, in fact of the 18 participants a common thread was the fact that the alliance stands for many as the first experience of in-person transgender culture. To quote participant *Fox* in an in-person qualitative interview said the following:

“So in real life trans culture... well I would say that culture as a whole would probably be when I came to COC and went to the trans alliance where its way more real life trans people and people who are like me. [...] when I eventually went to COC and met a whole group of trans people i'm like ‘wow I have finally found my community’ and these people while they're different and they all have their own unique differences to them we're all also very very similar so I think that going to college and meeting different trans people have allowed me to open up to real life trans culture and what it means to be in a trans space.”

This alongside the juxtaposition of most respondents mentioning some kind of online social media platform (the majority referencing Tumblr) shines a light on how they figured out their transness and how the concept of transnormativity, the idea that transgender people should assimilate into cisgender people's conceptions and understanding of gender can reinforce social stratification (transphobia) or dismantle it to create a more accepting and nurturing community.

Conclusion

Further research on the topic should go towards how transgender people construct their identities online as it's very under-researched alongside commonly used social media like Tumblr only mentioned in passing, there needs to be more research on how alternative social media like that of 4chan's /lgbt/ board builds, spreads, and maintains a culture that is used by transgender communities off the computer screen, to give an example terms like "boymoder", "hon", "egg", etc. are used in both online communication amongst transgender individuals and sometimes in-person. Alongside this, if given more time and resources there would be a much more experimental route taken in line with sociological methods like that of *photo voice*.

This research did suffer the flaw of being restrained by time as approximately 6 months were given to gather (with limited resources) interviews, data, and additional research resources in the writing of this paper however it should serve as a call to action for others in the field to do more research on transgender people by transgender people as very little research comes from their perspective despite being a vulnerable/marginalized population.

Appendix A: Survey (Qualitative)

1. When you think of the word transgender what is the first thing that comes to your mind?
Why do you think that is?
2. When did you realize that you were transgender? Where there any internal struggles that you had to resolve within yourself to accept that?
3. What was your first experience/encounter with transgender culture online? How do you think this experience changed your perception about gender and gender identity?
4. What was your first experience/encounter with in-person transgender culture? How do you think this experience changed your perception about gender and gender identity?
5. In your experience what is the reaction that other non-transgender individuals have towards witnessing transphobia?

Appendix B: Survey (Qualitative)

* 1. On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the least and 5 being the most how excited were you to participate in the event?

(5) Very excited

(4) Excited

(3) Neither excited nor unexcited

(2) Unexcited

(1) Very Unexcited

Question Title

2. Please choose which activity was your favorite.

Pronoun Pin Making

Patch Making

Origami

Coloring Table

Response table

Question Title

3. Would you like to do an event like this again?

Yes

No

Question Title

4. What could be done to improve the event if done again next year?

Question Title

5. How many glasses of water have you drank today? (This is a de-stress question)

0

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9+

Works Cited

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