

PART 1: RESEARCH & STATEMENT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUE

The social justice issue that I have chosen for my final project is unequal access to health care for transgender youth— specifically highlighting the harmful effects that this lack has on the children impacted. The issue of oppression toward transgender people has gained prominence in the public eye over the past few years. Nevertheless, it is important to state that although the public perception of this issue has increased in recent years, transgender individuals have been facing ridicule and dangerous judgment for a very long time. In particular, transgender youth are at the center of violence and shame. Children who discover they are transgender are often judged by those closest to them who tell them that their feelings toward their identity are invalid and that they are “Just going through a phase”. Just because a child is self-aware does not mean they are invalid.

Amongst the violence, stigma, and erasure that transgender youth feel from those around them and the politicians and officials in power who try to dictate their choices, transgender youth also experience inequality in the healthcare sphere. Adequate healthcare for transgender children is *dire and vital* for the preservation of their well-being. Examples of proper health care for transgender youth, or Gender-Affirming Care, include hormonal treatment; bottom and top surgery; mental health resources; physical and psychological therapy, and more. These resources work together and independently to sustain a comfortable transition and create a safe space for transgender youth, which should be an accessible right for all.

Nevertheless, this is not the case. Transgender youth in many states have been denied their rights to adequate, affordable Gender-Affirming Care. This lack of healthcare is cruel, discriminatory, detrimental, and dangerous to the lives of transgender youth. This lack of care has led to scarily high levels of suicide and suicidal attempts, alongside violence and stigma that

they already feel daily. My project aims to shed light on this issue in a personal, evocative way that illustrates the dangers of a lack of Gender-Affirming Care and the benefits of its accessibility.

While researching this topic, I came to the discovery that there were no accompanying archaeological studies that I could find; this is an issue that will be addressed later on. However, anthropological and sociological studies have examined the role that sex and gender have played in our society. These examinations partially explore how stigma against transgender people existed and still exists today. Rosemary A. Joyce's book *Ancient Bodies, Ancient Lives* details how ideas and societal expectations surrounding sex and gender have changed throughout the years. Specifically, they touch on how different cultures throughout history have had notions about sex and gender that go against those "socially accepted" by people in power today. For example, Joyce explains how Ancient Greek and Native American societies viewed sexual identity as ever-changing and fluctuating— something that shifts and evolves throughout the course of someone's life. To that end, Joyce details the association between sex, gender, and society, particularly how the world around us has molded our perceptions of what is and isn't socially acceptable regarding sexual identity. For the social justice issue I explore in my project, Joyce's text is significant in that it challenges the reader to reassess why or why not they deem a person's sexual identity as admissible.

Additionally, sociological studies have more closely examined my social justice issue, such as "Transgender Stigma and Health: A Critical Review of Stigma Determinants, Mechanisms, and Interventions" by Jaelyn M. White Hughto, Sari L. Reisner, and John E. Pachankis. White Hughto, Reisner, and Pachankis' study aims to examine the oppression that transgender individuals in the United States feel daily and determine what steps can be taken to

alleviate these intolerances. Consistent with the research that I have conducted, their study concludes that “transgender stigma limits opportunities and access to resources in a number of critical domains (e.g., employment, healthcare), persistently affecting the physical and mental health of transgender people” (White Hughto, Reisner, Pachankis). These conclusions go to show that the oppression that transgender individuals face spreads into every aspect of their life and prevents them from being able to live just because of their identity. Additionally, White Hughto, Reisner, and Pachankis’ study concludes that oppression against transgender individuals works on the intersectional level and operates in the individual, interpersonal, and structural spheres. Using their “Modified Social-Ecological Model of Transgender Stigma & Stigma Interventions”, White Hughto, Reisner, and Pachankis’ stress in their text that equality cannot exist on one level, but must exist in and cooperate with all facets and dimensions of life.

I believe that the lack of archaeological records of discrimination against transgender youth is consistent with what we have learned throughout the course of this semester. In particular, this lack of archaeological records reminded me of the erasure and historical misrepresentation that marginalized groups have faced throughout history, specifically in the archeological field. We know for certain that fluidity surrounding sexual identity has existed for a very long time and existed in ancient societies; if that is the case, why can I not find any records of this beyond recent years? I am finding hints of misrepresentation of history described by Linda Tuhiwai Smith and the erasure of true African culture by Carly Akeley creeping into the narrative of transgender representation. If we have learned anything about the exertion of oppression on marginalized groups, it is that adequate measures must be taken for the oppression to end. Similar to what we learned when discussing the decolonization of knowledge and representations in museums, if substantial efforts are not taken to stop discrimination in all

Feelings of shame

feelings of nonexistence,

When they don't learn about themselves

In school:

how are they supposed to grow into
themselves as people if they aren't
even taught that they're accepted?

To the Lawmakers and the Educators, if you need help on how to help:

“It is okay to feel the feelings that you do. I want you to feel safe, loved, accepted as you grow into the person that you want to be— and I will help and support you every step of the way”

If only it were easy for people to be kind.

Trans youth deserve to have a safe space for themselves.

They shouldn't feel like they have to run around in circles,

Praying for the day that they can stop and breathe—

eventually running out of oxygen.

They deserve a space like a hug,

reassurance, support, love

do you see the common denominator?

Instead they feel hate, shut out, not even allowed the basic, routine amount of healthcare—

Either too human or not human enough,

Trans youth are made to feel as though their identities are not:

Valid, correct, moral, natural, real—

That they must hide around corridors forever,

concealing themselves behind ashamed veils from

their families

their friends

their teachers

their community

the world.

No.2 : *“Is This How You Want Me To Feel?”*

THE DISCRIMINATION

Broken, unfixable,

AGAINST, AND UNEQUAL

unable to become.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

FOR TRANSGENDER YOUTH

MAKES THEM FEEL:

The lack of healthcare for trans youth force them to live inside an inescapable shell,

Walking around, living life with a dark, impenetrable cloud in their minds, pricking them with

Suicidal thoughts and ideations:

Not wanting to exist if they cannot exist in this world as themselves—

Being attacked by kids their own age, adults older than them, and people in power—

Who all enact different forms of violence against them—

Just for wanting to be themselves.

It is a cruel world we live in,
If children are denied basic rights and care
Just for wanting to express themselves as they want.

It's time for the world to wake up:

LACK OF TREATMENT = LACK OF IDENTITY
, LACK OF ACCEPTANCE = LOST LIVES.

No. 3 : *How It Should Be.*

In a world where compassion prevails,
Acceptance is accepted,
And love is love is love is love is love is love is love is love is love is love is love,
All trans youth will be able to feel GENDER EUPHORIA.

To be able to feel one with their own skin,
And have their inner expression match their outward expression,
So that they can be free and fly away from their worries and anxieties with unclipped wings.

The cloud that once consumed their cranium will dissipate into yellow rays of sun,
Illuminating their every feature and facet of their rightfully fulfilled existence.

And they will feel themselves bloom into the flower of their liking,

Nourished by the soils of love and support,
And the refreshing waters of being able to become.

Their lives will be sustained,
And not only will they be able to LIVE,
But they will be able to LIVE as THEMSELVES,
And they will be able to REPRESENT THEMSELVES,
In the ways that THEY WANT,
And they will live THEIR LIVES,
As they please.

No.4 : *What Can Be Done*

We know
Through the ills and difficulties of the world and its oppressors,
That simply speaking, and simply asking,
Is not enough.

Rather,
Communities must step in,
Join hands,
And work together to advocate for the children of tomorrow.

COLLECTION 2: OUR VOICES

No. 1 : *PIPER*

I know that I am lucky.

I feel the waves of support reverberating off of my family and friends,
Accepting me for being myself, in the skin and expression of my liking.

I know that I am lucky.

To be able to access the care that I need,
And fulfill the hormone treatments that I have wanted,
To make me feel one with my body, my heart, my mind.

I know that I am lucky.

I do, but I am, still, not always referred to as *me*.
Doctors who call me by my deadname or wrong pronouns,
Thinking “It’s okay, because at least she’s getting treatment”,
As if it's some type of privilege that only some deserve.

I know that I am lucky.

But, I am scared.

My home state, Georgia, is becoming one of the hateful states

Denying care for children like me,
As if it's some type of privilege that only some deserve.

I know that I am lucky.
I am going to flee this state as soon as i can,
It's too dangerous— targeting innocent children such as myself.
And I am going to make a life for myself,
in the ways that I want, and how I want it.

I know that I am lucky.
But others are not so lucky.
That is why we must fight the system to help them.
We must begin introducing trans doctors into the field,
So that they can help us,
Because they understand us,
And they won't judge us,
For wanting to be ourselves.

No. 2 : *KAYDEN*

** Trigger warning: violence, mentioning of suicide/suicial ideations**

I always knew there was something about me.
Since a young child— suffocating inside my own skin,

Wanting so badly to be different but not knowing why or how.

And once I began to grow into myself in my later years,

I hated myself even more.

I felt uncomfortable with the ways

My body represented itself,

But then eventually discovered,

That it is because I am trans.

When I finally came out,

I thought I would feel relieved— more able to be myself —

But instead I was pushed back

down into myself even further.

My family told me I was wrong,

as if they knew me better than myself,

And although terrified of being ridiculed by the public eye,

I'd rather be hated than pretend to be someone I'm not.

The day my principal outed me to my dad, everything changed.

Entering my house that day was like entering Hell:

“Abandon All Hope Ye Who Enter Here”

As my father forced me down squashing my trachea, attempting to

Force every last transgender breath out of me.

I was being tortured for being me,
I couldn't take it anymore,
I sought out the Escape Of All Escapes,
From the pain and judgment that has been inflicted on me,
Wanting desperately for it all to go away.

In and out of overdose, in and out of mental hospitals,
The doctors finally listened, finally understood that NONE OF THIS WAS MY FAULT.
It should not have taken them this long.

Foster care was not a complete safe haven either.
I was still not accepted for wanting to be myself,
I still do not understand why I cannot just be me.
Jumping in and out of hurdles just to be able to
Receive the hormonal health care that is my right,
Having to endure every source of pain imaginable just to
Be able to live like everyone else.

Once I began testosterone, everything changed.
Waves of peaced crashed and subsided within every pore of my body,
With every octave my voice lowered into.
My mental turmoils subsided,
As I was finally able to grow into how I view myself,

And receiving validation for such,
Is what has kept me alive.

I want my story to evoke change,
Children are being abused, hated, silenced,
And the simple answer is to provide them care—
To be empathetic.
Care to be themselves, Care from the violence of others, Care to live.
Health care changed my life, and I am sure it will
change the lives of all transgender youth.

PART 3: REFLECTION

I chose a series of poetry collections to be the format of my unessay because poetry is my main form of artistic expression. With poetry, I can use the tools of emotional expression, diction, narration, tone, and voice to tell a story from multiple perspectives. Poetry was a fitting choice for my unessay because it is as personal and intimate as the social justice issue I am representing. The unequal access to and discrimination against transgender youth in health care is a divisive and sensitive topic that brings forth a slew of emotions within the individuals oppressed. The main goal of my poetry collection was to be able to capture the sentiments of transgender youth to the best of my ability, and this will hopefully encourage and promote social justice to take place.

When writing these poems, my objective was to be able to cover multiple different sides of the issue of transgender discrimination. The first collection, “We are humans too, we feel too, we deserve too,” has poems that illustrate the feelings of oppression that transgender youth feel,

how the discrimination against and unequal access to healthcare for transgender youth impacts them, how proper healthcare benefits trans youth, and steps that can be taken to ensure proper, equitable health care. I wanted this collection to raise awareness of the issue at hand and give a glimpse of what the world would look like if this were to be the case. The second collection, “Our Voices”, takes a different approach than the first, and is written from the perspective of two transgender youths Piper and Kayden. To the best of my ability, my goal for this section was to attempt to relay the emotions associated with this experience of discrimination from the first-person perspective. It is intense, raw, and real. My hope for this section is that its vulnerability will open the eyes of lawmakers and politicians who are passing dangerous laws against transgender youth. I wondered, if they are confronted head-on with the feelings and emotions of these children, could things change? It’s worth a shot.

To write these poems, I researched each subsection and attempted to relay the issue through writing style, tone, diction, and voice. For the second section, I took the first-hand accounts of both Piper and Kayden and transformed them into poetic accounts. When doing so, I did not fabricate or embellish details of their story and kept the narrative consistent with what they were expressing. I believe the two collections I wrote work very well together, and I could not see one existing without the other.

Something that I learned and stuck with me throughout this project was the importance of representation. We have discussed and examined the significance of representation throughout the course and how harmful it can be for a marginalized group to be misrepresented by their white, European oppressors who try to write their stories from their false point of view. Additionally, we have discussed how important it is for marginalized groups to represent themselves and their culture in the ways they see fit. An example of this is the Northwest Coast

Hall we visited in the Museum of Natural History. The restoration of this hall allowed for the voices of the indigenous communities that it represents to be at the forefront while acknowledging and utilizing archaeological evidence, practices, and methods that they see fit.

This concept of adequate representation is important when it comes to transgender youth and is something that I was wary about when writing my poems. I was especially worried when writing the second collection, considering that I was writing this collection from the point of view of particular individuals in the transgender community. I feared I would accidentally end up like those we studied who misrepresented individuals in marginalized communities. What I learned, though, is the importance of respect, caution, and empathy when doing projects such as this. People like Akeley, who misrepresented an entire continent of individuals, did so because that was the only way he viewed Africa— he ignorantly believed that his perspective was the only perspective. By stepping outside of your point of view, and gaining the perspective of another, one will not only learn more about them, but can learn to be empathetic toward them as well.

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