San Jose State University

SJSU ScholarWorks

Faculty Research, Scholarly, and Creative Activity

1-1-2018

Beyond the tipping point: Modifying the five C's to empower transgender and gender expansive youth

Jonah De Chants
University of Denver

Heather Kennedy
University of Denver

Yolanda Anyon
yolanda.anyon@sjsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/faculty_rsca

BEYOND THE TIPPING POINT: MODIFYING THE FIVE C'S TO EMPOWER TRANSGENDER AND GENDER EXPANSIVE YOUTH

Jonah De Chants, Heather Kennedy, Yoli Anyon

Transgender people have entered an unprecedented moment of visibility in American society and across the globe. However, transgender and gender expansive youth remain vulnerable to family rejection, harassment at school, and discrimination in healthcare and employment. Positive Youth Development (PYD) is an established framework for strengths-based practice with young people that is focused on helping youth develop the skills they need to become healthy, productive adults. In this manuscript, we reconceptualize the 5 C's of PYD to address the unique needs and experiences of transgender and gender expansive youth. We also provide specific guidance for empowering service providers to help these young people thrive in the face of marginalization and oppression.

Keywords: Positive Youth Development, transgender, youth, gender expansive, empowerment, social justice, youth voice, strengths-based, empowerment-focused, practice model

Jonah De Chants is a third year doctoral student at the University of Denver's Graduate School of Social Work (GSSW). He is primarily interested in studying the experiences of homeless youth, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth, and approaches to youth empowerment.

Heather Kennedy, a doctoral student focusing on supporting adults and organizations who are engaging youth in creating community change. Her current research is on understanding how adults change from engaging with various Positive Youth Development programs, policies, and practices.

Yoli Anyon is dedicated to advancing theory, practice and policy for low-income adolescents of color through community-engaged research, teaching and service. Her work is organized around four general areas of inquiry: theory development, racial disparities in education, school-based interventions and positive youth development approaches.

THE TRANSGENDER TIPPING POINT

Transgender people have entered an unprecedented moment of visibility in American society and across the globe. TIME Magazine, citing the rise of transgender activists and popular culture figures, pronounced in 2014 that the United States had reached "the transgender tipping point" (Steinmetz, 2014). The Human Rights Campaign, however, declared that 2016 may have been the most dangerous year ever for transgender people, as increased visibility leads to more attempts to curtail their rights by elected officials (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2016). These legislative attacks, which include policies limiting transgender people's access to gender-affirming healthcare, undoing existing protections against discrimination, and restricting transgender people's access to gender-segregated public spaces, are particularly threatening to transgender and gender expansive youth. Of the 44 pieces of anti-transgender legislation proposed in state legislatures in the United States (US) as of February 19th, 2016, more than half (23) targeted transgender children and youth in school or sports programs, preventing them from accessing the facilities and teams of their identified gender (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2016). In the European context, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (EU), legally bound by the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009, sets forth the basic protections and freedoms of all people in EU member states. The Charter includes the rights of transgender people regarding human dignity, liberty and security, equality before the law, non-discrimination, healthcare, education, protection of data, freedom of movement and residence, and respect for family and personal life (European Union, 2012). Despite the Charter's proclamation of rights and freedoms, a 2013 survey by the Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) found that transgender people in the EU experience discrimination, harassment and violence in all spheres of their lives. Specifically, 24% of trans-identified adults had experienced discrimination at their school, 20% had experienced discrimination in healthcare settings, and 50% had experienced violence or harassment within the last five years (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014). Unfortunately, those with the highest rates of discrimination, harassment and violence were those who were young, low income, or unemployed. These trends reflect the reality that, 20 EU countries still require a condition of sterilization and 36 countries require an official mental health diagnosis in order to have a legally recognized transition in gender, and four countries still have no legal avenue for gender recognition (Transgender Europe, 2017a).

In light of these discriminatory policies across the US and Europe, it is clear that transgender and gender expansive youth face unique challenges and risks, including how to navigate coming out to adults and peers, accessing gender-affirming medical care, and expressing their identities through social, legal, or medical transition. Yet, the service needs of transgender and gender expansive youth are frequently ignored or underserved. Even in programs serving lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) young people, transgender youth report feeling excluded (Wagaman, 2014). There is also evidence that providers working with transgender and gender expansive youth need to be responsive to the needs of these young people in order to promote positive youth development. For example, a survey of social workers in a Southern State in the US found that 35% of respondents

CORRESPONDING AUTHORS:

Jonah DeChants
MSSP, University of Denver, Graduate School of Social Work, 2148 S High St, Denver, CO 80208 USA, Jonah.DeChants@du.edu

Heather Kennedy
MPH, University of Denver, Graduate School of Social Work, 2148 S High St, Denver, CO 80208 USA, Heather.Kennedy@ucdenver.edu

Yolanda Anyon
 MSW, PhD, University of Denver, Graduate School of Social Work, 2148 S High St, Denver, CO 80208 USA, Yolanda.Anyon@du.edu

would prevent transgender people from using the bathroom corresponding with their gender identity and 31% would fine them for using the "wrong bathroom" (Lennon-Dearing & Delavega, 2015).

Lamentably, there is little research on best practices for working with LGB youth and even less on working with transgender and gender expansive youth (Torres, Bernal, & Coolhart, 2012). This article endeavors to fill that gap by considering the core principles of the positive youth development (PYD) framework and offer modifications for programming that more appropriately serve the unique experiences and needs of transgender and gender expansive youth. Given the wide array of challenges which transgender and gender expansive youth experience, all organizations and individuals who work with these young people should consider how they can address those challenges and empower transgender and gender expansive youth to become healthy, happy adults.

WHO ARE TRANSGENDER YOUTH?

LANGUAGE AND TRANSGENDER IDENTITY

Before delving in a discussion of the challenges and needs of transgender and gender expansive youth, it is important to discuss the definitions of terms used throughout this article. Transgender is an umbrella term, encompassing people who do not identify with the sex that they were assigned at their birth (Torres, Bernal, & Coolhart, 2012). This community includes people who transition from male to female, from female to male, as well as people who identify as outside of the gender binary as genderqueer, gender fluid or agender. Some transgender people may choose to pursue medical transition, using hormones or surgery to align their bodies with their gender identity. Others express their gender identity through clothing or pronouns. It is important to note that not all youth who have non-traditional gender expressions may identify as transgender. In fact, some scholars have argued the binary categories of "transgender" and "cisgender" are limiting and reinforce ideas that transgender people are fundamentally different from cisgender people, who in fact also participate in their own forms of gender identity and gender expression (Ansara & Hegarty, 2014). Gender expansive is a term which includes people who may not identify as transgender but who defy, or are perceived to defy, traditional gender stereotypes and values through their gender expression (Shelton, 2016). Gender expansive people are often subject to the same forms of harassment and discrimination as transgender people. It is particularly important to include gender non-conformity in discussions of youth development, since adolescence is a time of experimentation with identity during which youth may defy gender roles or norms without identifying as transgender.

CHALLENGES FOR TRANSGENDER AND GENDER EXPANSIVE YOUTH

Transgender and gender expansive youth face several affronts to their health and well-being that compound the typical developmental challenges faced by all young people. The cumulative impact of multiple forms of discrimination and rejection has a profound impact on the social, emotional, and health outcomes among this population. Respondents to transgender-specific surveys both in the US and in Europe reported experiencing physical or sexual assault, homelessness, loss of employment due to transgender identity, participating in sex work and higher lifetime rates of suicide attempts, suggesting that these mental health challenges are in part the result of the anti-transgender discrimination and bias that transgender people must contend with on a daily basis (James et al., 2016; Trans Europe, 2017b). Transgender and gender expansive youth experience are at higher risk of mental health problems and suicide than their cisgender and gender-conforming peers. Compared to their LGB peers, transgender youth report lower levels of LGBT-specific self-esteem, life satisfaction, social support, and general health (Snapp, Watson, Russell, Diaz, & Ryan, 2015; Ryan et al., 2010). One study found that half of transgender people have experienced suicidal thoughts while a quarter have attempted suicide (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007). Fifty-three percent of US Trans Survey (USTS) respondents' ages 18-25 reported experiencing serious psychological distress (James et al., 2016). Ten percent of transgender respondents to the USTS survey ages 18 to 25 reported attempting suicide in the last year, compared to 1.6% of the all US adults that age (James et al., 2016). In the EU, a recent survey of five European countries found that six out of ten trans respondents are at risk for poor mental health (Trans Europe, 2017b). Unequal treatment and exclusion in healthcare often results in transgender people delaying treatment. In fact, in five European countries, 50% of trans people (ages 16-77) delayed seeking treatment because of their gender identity (Trans Europe, 2017b).

Family acceptance has been found to be a protective factor for all LGBT youth, with youth from accepting families reporting higher levels of self-esteem, social support, and general health (Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010). However, transgender and gender expansive youth are at a high risk of being rejected and kicked out of their homes by parents or other family members. Transgender youth report high levels of negative reaction from their parents after telling them about their gender identity (Grossman, D'Augelli, Howell, & Hubbard, 2008). Parents frequently struggle to understand their child's identity and can sometimes turn to reparative therapies, which aim to reverse the child's transgender identity. Such therapies have been shown to be coercive and harmful to youth (Reitman, et al., 2013). Although there is little quantitative data about the experiences of transgender and gender expansive youth, 40% of adult respondents to the USTS reported that their immediate family was unsupportive or neutral when they came out as transgender (James, et al., 2016). In the EU, according to the FRA survey (2014), over half of transgender people indicated that none or only a few family members and friends know about their transgender identity. Only 30% of respondents reported having work or school colleagues know about their true gender identity (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014).

Transgender and gender expansive youth also experience rejection in their educational environments. USTS survey respondents who reported being out as transgender in school also reported high rates of harassment, physical assault, and sexual violence. Seventeen percent of respondents left school because of this harassment (James et al., 2016). School facilities like bathrooms and locker rooms are often unsafe for transgender and gender expansive youth because they are unregulated by teachers or administrators and can be sites for harassment and violence from other students (Johnson, Singh, & Gonzalez, 2014). This violence is exacerbated by the recent wave of US policies which have attempted to ban discussion of LGBT issues and prohibit transgender youth from using the facilities of their chosen gender (Lennon-Dearer & Delavega, 2015; Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2016). In Europe, only 22 countries have policies that prohibit discrimination based on gender identity for people accessing goods and services such as education or healthcare (Trans Europe, 2017a).

Even after they have left school, transgender and gender expansive youth still have to contend with discrimination in the job market and healthcare settings. Transgender and gender expansive people experience high rates of unemployment and underemployment, elevated levels of poverty, and high rates of job loss due to their gender identity or transgender status (James et al., 2016; Grant et al., 2011). Many turn to underground economies, such as commercial sex work or selling drugs, in order to survive, increasing their contact with the criminal justice system. Anti-transgender stigma is evident at multiple levels of the healthcare system (White-Hughto, Reisner, & Pachankis, 2015). Thirty-three percent of respondents to the USTS survey reported negative experiences with healthcare providers due to their transgender identity, including being refused to service, harassment, or having to educate medical professionals about transgender health and healthcare (James et al., 2016). Transgender and gender expansive people, including youth, have transition-related heathcare needs that are expensive and frequently not covered by insurance (James et al., 2016; Grant et al., 2011; Wagaman, 2014).

Obtaining and using identity documents is also another source of discrimination. In the US, transgender people report high levels of harassment and violence when "outed" by using identity documents that do not match their gender identity (Grant et al., 2011; James et al., 2016). Specifically, 40% of survey respondents who reported using incorrect documents reported harassment and 3% reported being assaulted or attacked (Grant et al., 2011). In the EU, 33% respondents of the FRA survey felt discriminated against when they had to show documentation with their outdated identities. Furthermore, many transgender people are unsure of the legal process in their state or country for changing their documents (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014). Due to the significant financial and legal burdens of changing both name and gender marker on all identity documents, only 11% of transgender people have changed all their legal documents (James et al., 2016).

These statistics illustrate that transgender and gender expansive youth have unique experiences and needs as they grow up in societies that marginalize and oppress them. Thus, transgender and gender expansive youth must develop additional competencies to advocate for themselves in nearly every sphere of their lives, from families to medical providers.

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

A potential framework for conceptualizing transgender youth's adaptation in the face of these stressors is positive youth development (PYD). PYD emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a response to risk-oriented research and prevention frameworks. Specifically, Karen Pittman, among others, articulated that "problem free is not full

prepared" (Pittman, 1992). Researchers who study PYD and practitioners who use it are interested in how youth develop into healthy, functioning adults. Generally, PYD involves engaging youth and their families, communities and governments, to ensure youth feel empowered and reach their full potential. PYD programs and approaches are designed to build youth's knowledge and skills, influence attitudes, strengthen relationships, and transform the systems and environment in favor of the developing young person (Jenson, Alter, Nicotera, Anthony, & Forrest-Bank, 2012). PYD and other developmental system theories reject the split between nature and nurture as reductionist and instead use an ecological model of human development, integrating different levels of interaction between persons and their environments (Lerner, 2005). Just as youth are impacted by their environment, which can facilitate or hinder their development into healthy adults, youth also have an impact on their environments and communities. Those environments that are rich in "developmental assets", such as schools, programs, or supportive relationships are more conducive to healthy development than environments that offer youth fewer material and emotional resources (Lerner, 2005).

While many frameworks and models have been associated with PYD, the most empirically supported model to date has been the "5 C's." This framework is grounded in five main constructs that predict positive outcomes: competence, confidence, connection, caring, and character (Lerner, 2005; Lerner, Dowling & Anderson 2003). Competence includes having knowledge and skills across several domains, including social, academic, cognitive and vocational. Confidence includes a sense of self-worth, positive identity, and self-efficacy. Connection refers to positive bonds formed between the young person, their peers, family, school, and community. Character involves having personal values, social conscience, appreciation of diversity, and understanding and respect for laws and social rules. Caring involves sympathy, empathy and compassion for others (Bowers et al., 2010; Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005). Scholars of PYD posit that when a young person demonstrates the five C's across time, he or she will be on a life trajectory towards an "idealized adulthood" (Lerner, 2005). Research has documented that youth who demonstrate the five C's of PYD are less likely to have problem behaviors such as depression, aggression, and substance abuse (Lerner, 2005).

Although studies using the PYD framework have proliferated in recent years, research on transgender youth has not kept pace with these conversations. Few studies have considered the unique developmental trajectories of gender expansive youth, and how they are impacted by both increasing awareness and discrimination towards the trans community, despite long-standing research suggesting that these concepts need to be adapted for young people who live in a cultural context that is different than the larger mainstream society (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Recently, scholars have argued that the five C's in particular need to be contextualized and modified for youth with non-dominant cultural backgrounds or marginalized identities (Travis & Leech, 2014). In light of transgender and gender expansive youth's unique exposure to discrimination and oppression, we propose that the five C's of the PYD framework should be modified to accommodate their experiences and circumstances.

MODIFYING THE 5 C'S FOR TRANSGENDER YOUTH

While the 5 Cs have served as an empirically valid framework for youth development broadly, other scholars who work with and for young people from marginalized groups, have argued that these concepts should be adapted for young people who have experienced oppression (Cammarota & Romero, 2009; Travis & Leech, 2014). Indeed, a recent meta-analysis found that positive youth development programs are not as successful with high-risk youth (Ciocanel, Power, Eriksen, & Gillings, 2017). Therefore, it is important to describe ways in which PYD approaches can be adapted to address the unique personal and environmental challenges that are faced by trans and gender expansive young people.

This paper offers a discussion of the original five C's of PYD (confidence, competence, character, connection, and caring). Each of these concepts are briefly discussed, following longer sections on how each concept can be modified to address the needs of transgender and gender expansive youth, and how service providers can empower transgender and gender expansive youth to develop into healthy and engaged adults. Our focus on the skills service providers can employ to support transgender and gender expansive youth is strategic. In all positive youth development approaches, adults play a critical role in facilitating child and adolescent outcomes. Research suggests that when adults who work with youth have appropriate education and training, they have higher self-reported competencies for implementing strong positive youth development programs, which in turn has significant impacts on youth and program outcomes (Borden & Perkins, 2006; Evans, Sicafuse, Killian, Davidson, & Loesch-Griffin, 2010). However, the literature is scant on the practices that adult facilitators should do to encourage positive youth development, particularly among specific groups of youth who have experienced marginalization. We aim to ad-

dress this limitation of the extant literature by calling out specific strategies practitioners can use to promote the 5 C's among transgender and gender nonconforming youth.

CONFIDENCE

Confidence involves a young person's beliefs and attitudes about their abilities. It is related to the exploration and expression of identity, or the coherent sense of self, which is important during adolescence. In developing a sense of confidence, an adolescent is self-reflective of each of their abilities across a range of developmental domains (e.g. academic, social, athletic). Their resulting high or low confidence depends on the value each individual places on that domain (Roth-Herbst, Borbely, Brooks-Gunn, 2007).

Transgender and GE Youth's Needs

Transgender and gender expansive youth must learn to deflect the transphobic and gender policing messages that they receive each day from their families, school, peers, and larger society. They witness efforts to deny their basic human rights, such as the right to use the restroom safely in public spaces, and they must learn to not internalize those messages as indicative as their inherent worth. Similar to youth of color, who develop a "cultural armor" to protect against "the demons of despair, dread and disappointment" of living in a racist society (West, 2005, as cited in Travis & Leech, 2014), it is likely that transgender youth must develop a protective layer of confidence to buffer against society's pervasive transphobia. This confidence may be difficult to build when anti-transgender and gender policing messages come from such intimate and authoritative figures as parents and religious leaders. It may also be particularly hard for youth to develop confidence when representations of transgender people in the media center upon the difficulties they face, the risks they encounter, and their status as "others" (McInroy, & Craig, 2015). Much of the research on LGBT people, and transgender people in particular, focuses on their environmental risks and vulnerabilities. LGBT youth can internalize these messages as statements about their inherent worth, rather than the results of societal bias and discrimination (Wagaman, 2015).

Practitioner skills

In order to support a positive self-identity and promote confidence, adults can expose youth to transgender-affirming campaigns or programs that combat negative messaging and inspire self-appreciation among transgender and gender expansive youth. The #RealLiveTransAdult campaign was started on social media after the well-publicized suicide of transgender teen Leelah Alcorn in late 2014 (Clifton, 2014). Transgender adults posted messages about their current lives as a way of letting youth know that they can thrive in adulthood. Trans100 is another community initiative that honors the achievements and accomplishment of one hundred transgender individuals each year (Nichols, 2015). Service providers working with transgender and gender expansive youth should expose youth of all gender identities to positive examples of transgender people.

Another way to support an adolescent's confidence is to ensure they are engaged in activities such as community service groups within the LGBT community. These types of activities, as long as they are safe and free of prejudice, have been shown to contribute to a positive sense of self (Roth-Herbst, Borbely, Brooks-Gunn, 2007). Such community service projects can also be an opportunity for transgender and gender expansive youth to meet transgender adults and develop positive relationships with role models.

COMPETENCE

Competence is generally used to describe youths' mastery of social, academic, cognitive, or vocational skills (Lerner, 2005). Competence usually refers to the ability to be "successful" at certain developmental tasks (e.g. reading, following the rules, playing a sport, forming close friendships, developing a sense of identity) (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Competence includes two elements: the successful demonstration of ability, and the capacity to perform the same or similar actions well in different contexts (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Therefore, the work of supporting competence is encouraging the transferability of competencies across contexts and time.

Transgender and GE Youth Needs

Given the lack of awareness of transgender identities in mainstream society, parents, teachers, employers, mental and physical healthcare providers, and other adults may frequently misunderstand transgender and gender expan-

sive youth's needs. By necessity, then, transgender and gender expansive youth must become adept self-advocates who educate others about their experiences and needs. Transgender and gender expansive youth must learn how to think strategically about when to disclose their gender identity to family, friends, teachers, and other authority figures. They must learn how to assess risk and determine whether it is safe for them come out, as well as how to respond in situations where their transgender status is revealed by circumstances outside of their control. In addition to navigating a maze of complex legal and medical systems, transgender and gender expansive youth have to learn how to avoid or mitigate the harassment and violence to which those systems expose them.

Practitioner skills

Practitioners working with transgender and gender expansive youth can help youth practice the self-advocacy they need to survive by creating spaces where their gender expression is normalized. Adults should have everyone articulate their preferred name and pronouns during introductions at the start of programs, when new youth or staff members arrive, and in community meetings. Chosen names and pronouns should be used and respected by everyone who is involved with the program, increasing transgender and gender-expansive youths' self-esteem and decreasing stigma (McLemore, 2015). Adult staff should be vigilant that no youth are being bullied or harassed. Once adult staff members have created a safe and welcoming environment for transgender and gender expansive youth within their own programs, they can begin to teach these young people to be advocates in other domains of their lives. Adults should allow transgender and gender expansive youth to share and discuss their struggles with parents, family, teachers, or other adults. Staff should help youth consider solutions to their struggles and offer to share resources about gender identity with families or schools. Within each youth organization or school, adults can be allies for transgender and gender expansive youth by advocating for changes to increase the safety of these environments. Organizations like PFLAG, Gender Spectrum, and local LGBT Centers offer online and in-person trainings for best practices on working with transgender youth. Such training can help adults gain competence in disrupting the gender binary and supporting transgender and gender expansive youth.

CHARACTER

Character includes attitudinal and behavioral components. Specifically, character involves an adolescent's values and the resulting actions from the internalization and enactment of those values (Roth-Herbst, Borbely, Brooks-Gunn, 2007). Values are principles that we hold that guide our thinking. Peterson and Seligman (2004) conceptualize six dimensions of character: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. Wisdom refers to one's love of learning and creativity. Courage is related to bravery. Humanity refers to kindness and decency. Justice involves respect for laws, leadership and teamwork. Temperance refers to one's ability to self-control, forgiveness and mercy. Transcendence refers to spirituality, hope, and an appreciation for beauty.

Transgender and GE youth needs

Discussions of character, values, and morality can be especially fraught for transgender and gender expansive youth, who have frequently been told that their very existence is contrary to social mores. They may have deeply ingrained feelings of guilt stemming from being demonized and castigated by religious and moral authorities. Transgender and gender expansive youth may also reject or rebel against societal norms. Nonetheless, transgender and gender expansive youth still must wrestle with questions of right and wrong. They must decide what their values are, sometimes in the absence of, or in defiance against, the religious traditions in which they were raised. They must also learn how to live in accordance with those values, despite the many transphobic barriers they encounter. Indeed, some of the transphobic obstacles which transgender and gender expansive youth encounter in their daily lives can help them develop character in unique ways. Transgender and gender expansive youth's need for self-exploration and knowledge about gender identity may give them wisdom about how gender norms operate in society. Their determination to come out and live authentically, despite significant challenges, certainly speaks to their courage. And transgender and gender expansive youth must practice self-control and forgiveness every day as they encounter peers and adults who may not understand their gender identity and, intentionally or unintentionally, disrespect them.

Practitioner skills

Service providers should work with transgender and gender expansive youth to develop their personal mores, exposing them to secular value systems and faith traditions that are transgender-affirming. To do so, providers might invite leaders of a variety of traditions that accept and celebrate all types of gender identities to interact with youth participants. Many denominations and faiths have their own LGBT advocacy organization which can be contacted for resources or to get connected to trans-affirming clergy. Examples include Keshet, Al-Fatiha, Affirmation, and Dignity USA. Providers should also consider incorporating education about and discussions of personal values related to persisting in the face of adversity in their youth programs. Discussions or learning activities about justice and the value of rules may be especially spirited, since transgender and gender expansive youth are so frequently marginalized by rules dictating the enforcement of gender binaries. Adults can help youth learn about the benefits and drawbacks of rules as a method of justice and teach them to advocate for changing unjust rules. When considering transcendence and appreciation for beauty, service providers should expose transgender and gender expansive youth to transgender art, both historical and contemporary, that subverts traditional binaries and promotes new aesthetic forms. Examples of contemporary artists include poet Alok Vaid-Menon, actress Laverne Cox, and musician Ryan Cassata.

CARING AND COMPASSION

Caring involves the ability to recognize and respond to other's feelings, and the skill in knowing what to when faced with different emotions (Rauner, 2000). A young person demonstrates caring when they examine different perspectives, which allows for them to appreciate the concerns and circumstances of others (Roth-Herbst, Borbely, Brooks-Gunn, 2007).

Transgender and GE youth needs

Transgender and gender expansive youth do not have any unique barriers to developing compassion, although they are likely to experience aggression and hostility from others. Transgender and gender expansive youth may therefore benefit from the social empathy framework, which combines empathy with contextual understanding and social responsibility (Wagaman, 2011). Social empathy views empathy as the foundation of empowerment; youth must be able to empathize with another before they can mobilize for action and social change (Wagaman, 2011). Transgender and gender expansive youth may have had negative experiences with their peers and therefore be distrustful of other youth. They should be given opportunities to empathize with both their transgender and cisgender peers in order to build connections and opportunities to care for one another. Given the high rates of psychological distress and suicidal thoughts among transgender and gender expansive youth (James et al., 2016), transgender and gender expansive youth need to learn how to practice self-care and care for their peers in a society which often denies their existence. Specific skills which may help them develop a practice of caring include basic coping techniques for managing anxiety, trauma, or stress or learning how to talk to a friend who discloses thoughts of suicide or self-harm.

Practitioner skills

Adults working with transgender and gender expansive youth should provide opportunities for both social empathy and care for self and others. Programs that teach transgender and gender expansive youth to empathize with other marginalized groups, equip them with knowledge of how their marginalization is systematically operationalized, and instill them with a sense of responsibility over the conditions of others, can empower them to confront social ills, including but not limited to, transphobia, sexism, and homophobia. Adults can help youth turn this social empathy into action, confronting injustices in their schools and communities. Adults working with transgender and gender expansive youth can also teach best practices for self-care and mental health first aid. Youth can be trained in how to support friends in crisis or be given techniques for how to cope when feeling triggered or stressed. Trainings like Youth Mental Health First Aid or the Trevor Project's CARE program can provide both youth and adults with the skills they need to support transgender youth. It is particularly important that adults working with transgender and gender expansive youth model being attentive to other people's needs and responding appropriately. Adults can also support perspective taking, or teach youth to examine conflicts or problems from different angles and points of view. These skills will help transgender and gender expansive youth develop a sense

of caring and compassion that they will carry with them into their adult lives.

CONNECTION

Connection refers to a youth's positive relationships with individuals and institutions in their life. These connections are bidirectional, with youth both contributing to and benefiting from the relationship (Lerner, 2005). For most youth, connections come from adults in their families, schools, or afterschool programs.

Transgender and GE youth needs

Family bonds can be strained or broken, so many transgender and gender expansive youth have to find and make other connections. Depending on their school environment, teachers and administrators may also not be an option for healthy relationships (Johnson, Singh, & Gonzalez, 2014). Many transgender and gender expansive youth seek out connections with other members of the LGBT community. Youth who report having friends who know about their sexual orientation or gender identity report better life situations and higher LGBT-specific self-esteem (Snapp et al., 2015). A qualitative study of adult transgender women of color found that transgender women form informal social networks to exchange information and resources. These networks are a form of social capital, a place where transgender women can give and receive emotional support and tips regarding how to navigate medical and insurance systems (Pinto, Melendez, & Spector, 2008). Connections with other gender expansive youth can be a powerful force, normalizing transgender and gender expansive youths' experiences and feelings. Unfortunately, given the relatively small number of transgender people, it can be difficult for youth to find and connect with one another.

Practitioner skills

Service providers working with transgender and gender expansive youth should help them connect with other transgender people to form connections and build community. Providers can do this by inviting transgender and gender expansive adults to visit their programs, or establishing mentoring relationships between youth and adults. Providers may want to contact other youth programs in their area and organize joint activities for transgender and gender expansive youth who may be isolated in their schools or home communities. One potential school-based club to support transgender and gender expansive youth is the Gender and Sexualities Alliance (or GSA). Providers can help youth learn to determine if a new friend or contact is trust worthy or safe. Given the paucity of transgender individuals, many transgender and gender expansive youth are physically isolated and may reach out to other transgender people through the Internet or informal connections. Due to the relative anonymity of most chat rooms, it can be hard to assess whether someone is being truthful. This eagerness to connect and lack of in-person connection makes transgender and gender expansive youth uniquely vulnerable to exploitation or mistreatment. Service providers can teach youth both online and in-person techniques for safely meeting new acquaintances and cultivating trust with new friends. There are an array of websites that offer suggestions for maintaining safety in online environments, for example KidSmart uses the acronym S.M.A.R.T to remind students to be safe, refrain from meeting in person, not to accept attachments or files, remind them people may not be who they say they are, and to tell a parent or adult mentor if suspicious activity occurs (Childnet International, n.d.). Teaching transgender and gender expansive youth to connect with other transgender people or allies who will support them will prevent them from being mistreated by strangers and help them cultivate meaningful, supportive relationships with peers and adults.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

PYD practitioners must recognize the unique needs of transgender and gender expansive youth and should modify their operationalization of the five C's to account for those unique needs. Practitioners working with transgender and gender expansive youth must intentionally help youth build competencies to navigate coming out, grow their confidence despite the anti-transgender biases they face, foster connections and community with other transgender and gender expansive people, and promote social empathy and moral growth. Some best practices for making youth-serving programs safe spaces for transgender and gender expansive youth are to ask young people what

names and pronouns they would like to use during the program, establish group norms that prevent gender-related bullying or harassment, and train all staff on gender identity and sexual orientation cultural sensitivity. Service providers should be open about issues of gender identity so that youth know that they are a safe person to come out to or ask for help. Finally, organizations can work with transgender and gender expansive youth to work on social action projects, confronting policies and societal forces, which marginalize them, and creating a space for empowerment. Transgender and gender expansive youth are currently experiencing a unique historical moment. Never before have they been so visible and able to come out to their families, school, and communities. However, never before have they been so thoroughly attacked by anti-transgender legislation and overt discrimination. School, medial facilities, and other systems remain woefully underprepared to serve these young people as they prepare for adulthood. Positive youth development practitioners have a powerful opportunity to address the needs of transgender and gender expansive youth and empower them to become healthy adults and engaged citizens.

REFERENCES

Ansara, Y. G., & Hegarty, P. (2014). Methodologies of misgendering: Recommendations for reducing cisgenderism in psychological research. *Feminism & Psychology*, 24(2), 259-270.

Borden, L. M., & Perkins, D. F. (2006). Community Youth Development Professionals: Providing the Necessary Supports in the United States. Child and Youth Care Forum, 35(2), 101–158. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-005-9005-4

Bowers, E. P., Li, Y., Kiely, M. K., Brittian, A., Lerner, J. V., & Lerner, R. M. (2010). The five Cs model of positive youth development: A longitudinal analysis of confirmatory factor structure and measurement invariance. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 39(7), 720–735.

Cammarota, J., & Romero, A. F. (2009). A Social Justice Epistemology and Pedagogy for Latina/o Students: Transforming Public Education with Participatory Action Research. *New Directions for Youth Development*, (123), 53–65.

Childnet International (n.d.) Chatting online and child safety. Retrieved 7, November 2017 from http://www.kidsmart.org.uk/downloads/chatGuide.pdf

Ciocanel, O., Power, K., Eriksen, A., & Gillings, K. (2017). Effectiveness of Positive Youth Development Interventions: A Meta-Analysis of Randomized Controlled Trials. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 46(3), 483–504. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-016-0555-6

Clifton, D. (2014, December 31). 'These Powerful #RealLiveTransAdult Tweets Are Showing Trans Youth They're Not Alone.' [Online] http://mic.com/articles/107474/these-powerful-real-live-trans-adult-tweets-are-showing-trans-youth-they-re-not-alone#.zDNVeTsFS [Accessed on 11/13/17].

Evans, W. P., Sicafuse, L. L., Killian, E. S., Davidson, L. A., & Loesch-Griffin, D. (2010). Youth Worker Professional Development Participation, Preferences, and Agency Support. *Child & Youth Services*, 31(1–2), 35–52. https://doi.org/10.1080/01459350903505579

Grant, J. M., Mottet, L., Tanis, J., Harrison, J., Herman, J. L., & Keisling, M. (2011). Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey. *Washington National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force*. http://doi.org/10.1016/S0016-7878(90)80026-2

Grossman, A. H., D'Augelli, A. R., Howell, T. J., & Hubbard, S. (2008). Parent' reactions to transgender youth' gender nonconforming expression and identity. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 18(1), 3-16.

Grossman, A. H., & D'Augelli, A. R. (2007). Transgender youth and life-threatening behaviors. *Suicide & Life-Threatening Behavior*, 37(5), 527–537. http://doi.org/10.1300/J082v51n01_06

European Union, (26 October 2012). *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*, 2012/C 326/02, Retrieved 29 October 2017 from: http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3b70.html

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014). Being trans in the European Union: Comparative analysis of EU LGBT survey data. Retrieved 29 October 2017 from: http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/being-trans-eu-comparative-analysis-eu-lgbt-survey-data

Human Rights Campaign Foundation. (2016). *Anti-Transgender Legislation Spreads Nationwide, Bill Targeting Transgender Children Surge*. Washington D.C.

James, S. E., Herman, J. L., Rankin, S., Keisling, M., Mottet, L., & Anafi, M. A. (2016). The report of the 2015 US transgender survey. *Washington, DC: National Center for Transgender Equality*.

Jenson, J. M., Alter, C. F., Nicotera, N., Anthony, E. K., & Forrest-Bank, S. S. (2012). *Risk, Resilience, and Positive Youth Development: Developing Effective Community Programs for At-Risk Youth: Lessons from the Denver Bridge Project*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199755882.001.0001

Johnson, C. W., Singh, A. A., & Gonzalez, M. (2014). "It's complicated": collective memories of transgender, queer, and questioning youth in high school. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 61(3), 419–434. http://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2013.842436

Lennon-Dearing, R., & Delavega, E. (2015). Policies Discriminatory of the LGBT Community: Do Social Workers Endorse Respect for the NASW Code of Ethics? *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 27(4), 412. http://doi.org/10.1080/10538720.2015.1087266

Lerner, R. M. (2005). Promoting positive youth development: Theoretical and empirical bases. *Prepared for the Workshop on the Science of Adolescent Health and Development , National Research Council*, 92.

Lerner, R. M., Almerigi, J. B., Theokas, C., & Lerner, J. V. (2005). Positive Youth Development A View of the Issues. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, *25*(1), 10–16. http://doi.org/10.1177/0272431604273211

Lerner, R. M., Dowling, E. M., & Anderson, P. M. (2003). Positive Youth Development: Thriving as the Basis of Personhood and Civil Positive Youth Development : Thriving as the Basis of Personhood and Civil Society. *Applied Developmental Science*, *7*(3), 172–180. http://doi.org/10.1207/S1532480XADS0703

Masten, A., & Coatsworth, J. (1998). *The Development of Competence in Favorable and Unfavorable Environments: Lessons from Research on Successful Children* (Vol. 53). https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.53.2.205

McInroy, L. B., & Craig, S. L. (2015). Transgender representation in offline and online media: LGBTQ youth perspectives. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, *25*(6), 606-617.

McLemore, K. A. (2015). Experiences with misgendering: Identity misclassification of transgender spectrum individuals. *Self and Identity*, *14*(1), 51-74.

Nichols, J. (2015, March 30). 2015 Trans 100 Honors Positive Work By Transgender And Gender Expansive People Nationwide. *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved March 07, 2016, from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/30/2015-trans-100_n_6969702.html

Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. (2004). Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification (Vol. 1). Oxford University Press.

Pinto, R. M., Melendez, R. M., & Spector, A. Y. (2008). Male-to-Female Transgender Individuals Building Social Support and Capital From Within a Gender-Focused Network. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, *20*(3), 203–220. http://doi.org/10.1080/10538720802235179

Pittman, K. J. (1992). Defining the fourth R: promoting youth development through building relationships. Retrieved from http://www.popline.org/node/342796

Rauner, D. M. (2000). *They still pick me up when I fall:*

the role of caring in youth development and community life. New York: Columbia University Press. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&AN=74631

Reitman, D. S., Austin, B., Belkind, U., Chaffee, T., Hoffman, N. D., Moore, E., Morris, R., Olson, J. & Ryan, C. (2013). Recommendations for Promoting the Health and Well-Being of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Adolescents: A Position Paper of the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine: Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 52(4), 506-510.

Roth-Herbst, J., Borbely, C., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2007) Developing Indicators of Confidence, Character, and Caring in Adolescents In Brown, B. *Key indicators of child and youth well-being : completing the picture*. Retrieved from https://ebookcentral.proquest.com

Ryan, C., Russell, S. T., Huebner, D., Diaz, R., & Sanchez, J. (2010). Family acceptance in adolescence and the health of LGBT young adults. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, *23*(4), 205–213. http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6171.2010.00246.x

Shelton, J. (2016). Reframing risk for transgender and gender-expansive young people experiencing homelessness. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, *28*(4), 277-291.

Snapp, S. D., Watson, R. J., Russell, S. T., Diaz, R. M., & Ryan, C. (2015). Social Support Networks for LGBT Young Adults: Low Cost Strategies for Positive Adjustment. *Family Relations*, *64*(3), 420–430. http://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12124

Steinmetz, K. (2014). The transgender tipping point. *Time*, *183* (22). 38-46.

Torres Bernal, A., & Coolhart, D. (2012). Treatment and Ethical Considerations with Transgender Children and Youth in Family Therapy. *Journal of Family Psychotherapy*, *23*(February), 287–303. http://doi.org/10.1080/08975353.2012.735594

Travis, R., & Leech, T. G. J. (2014). Empowerment-based positive youth development: A new understanding of healthy development for African American youth. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, *24*(1), 93–116. http://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12062

Transgender Europe (2017a) Trans Rights Europe Map & Index 2017. Retrieved 29 October 2017 from: https://tgeu.org/trans-rights-map-2017/

Transgender Europe, (2017b) Overdiagnosed but Underserved, Retrieved 29 October 2017, from: https://tgeu.org/healthcare/

Wagaman, M. A. (2011). Social Empathy as a Framework for Adolescent Empowerment. *Journal of Social Service Research*, *37*(3), 278–293. http://doi.org/10.1080/01488376.2011.564045

Wagaman, M. A. (2014). Understanding Service Experiences of LGBTQ Young People Through an Intersectional Lens. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, *26*(1), 111–145. http://doi.org/10.1080/10538720.2013.866867

Wagaman, M. A. (2015). Changing Ourselves, Changing the World: Assessing the Value of Participatory Action Research as an Empowerment-Based Research and Service Approach With LGBTQ Young People. *Child & Youth Services*, *36*(2), 124–149. http://doi.org/10.1080/0145935X.2014.1001064

West, C. (2005). Democracy matters: Winning the fight against imperialism. Penguin.

White Hughto, J. M., Reisner, S. L., & Pachankis, J. E. (2015). Transgender Stigma and Health: A Critical Review of Stigma Determinants, Mechanisms, and Interventions. *Social Science & Medicine*, *147*, 222–231. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2015.11.010

ADDENDUM

Resources for Practitioners working with Transgender and Gender Expansive Youth

GSA Network, a network supporting LGBTQ clubs in schools: https://gsanetwork.org/

The Trevor Project, supporting suicide prevention among LGBTQ youth: https://www.thetrevorproject.org/

The National Center for Transgender Equality, a US-based advocacy organization: https://transequality.org/

Transgender Europe, a EU-based advocacy organization: https://tgeu.org/

Mental Health First Aid, offering trainings on youth mental health: https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/

PFLAG, a support organization for parents and families of LGBTQ people: https://www.pflag.org/