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Towards a Trans Pedagogy of Solidarity:

Creating Trauma-Informed, Anti-Oppressive Learning Environments to Support Gender Diverse Learners

A portfolio submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Education
By Jude Ashburn

September 10th, 2019

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Committee Member: Teresa Socha

Lakehead University

Dedication

This portfolio is dedicated to the loving memory of Baxter Podd, 2003-2018.

"I'll be damned if I go to my grave without having the respect this community deserves"

(Sylvia Rivera, Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries speech, 1971).

Abstract

This Master of Education equips educators and school administrators who wish to better support trans and gender diverse students in the classroom and throughout the education system. This work introduces the historical and ongoing legacies of institutionalized transphobia, cissexism, compulsory heterosexuality, and binarism inherent within the colonial education system, which not only impedes the learning of trans and gender diverse students, but also contributes significantly to the discrimination and suicidality that they face on a daily basis. My literature review, as one piece of this portfolio, surveys contemporary gender identity and inclusion policies, contextualized by recent government attacks against such curriculum, in order to highlight the ongoing youth activism advocating for sexual and gender justice within the school system. The main task of this portfolio was to create two workshops that can be easily tailored for any educator who wishes to engage with the topic of gender as a social, political, and contextual project, as well as a deeply personal experience requiring self-reflection and safer conditions within which to consider its functionality in one's life. With the goal of serving as a toolkit, this portfolio offers up a theoretical paradigm in which an anti-colonial, anti-fascist trans pedagogy can be used to teach critical gender studies during times of rising bigotry against oppressed peoples, trans people among them.

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Letter to a Gender Rebel, Summer 2019

(by a trans teacher for a trans student)

Hey, you.

Sitting there in the hallway of your high school, often alone, with the lavender-hair-band-t-shirt-take-no-shit aesthetic armor, carrying that sketchbook filled with drawings of your icons and friends. Body sore and heart open. Wearing your pride on your sleeve when you can, and deep down inside of you when you can't. Always visible to those who know how to look.

Brave and snarky and tender.

You, often staring into your cell phone, scrolling through faces of other trans kids on Tumblr or Twitter, so that you don't forget what we look like when you are in spaces that make you feel invisible. Building networks and webs.

Searching for a reflection of yourself somewhere so that you don't feel like a vampire.
Or, at least, always searching for other vampires.

You, with a heavy heart and open eyes, always talking your friends off the edge, always listening for that 2am text from them, always ready to make them feel less alone, day in and day out.

You, who probably wants to be a social worker or teacher or nurse. Who just wants to give the care that you so desperately need for yourself. Always giving, hoping, dreaming.

I see you. I recognize you. I know you with all of my heart. And I need you to know that I am always looking for you too; that I am always looking for us, everywhere that I go.

Do you know the legacy from which you were born into this world? Do you know the names of the trancestors who called you into existence? Do you know how much you were wanted, needed, dreamed of, wished for, prayed for, called out for?

Marsha P. Johnson. Leslie Feinberg. Sylvia Rivera. Miss Major. So many beautiful, chosen, magical names of your family members. Learn them. Share their stories with your friends. Turn to them for strength when you need it.

Do you know how powerful we are when we come together? Every effort to prevent us from doing so has always failed, and it always will. We are a collective unit. We grieve, we laugh, we make beauty, and we fight. We build the families that make up for the loss. We cast intergenerational spells for healing and resistance. We answer the calls of those who came before us. We speak their names everywhere, and we speak loudly.

Every trans person is a miracle. Every gender rebel is a gift. We make new worlds possible.

Take care of yourself. Sleep. Eat. Care for the land. Share what you have with your friends. Know your legacy. Do not settle for less than you deserve. Reject every law and constraint that is designed to make you do so. Find the other vampires and monsters and aliens. They were always the heroes. Find us.

None of this will be easy. Your grief will be profound and it will never fully subside. The fight ahead of us is the biggest fight of our collective existence. Remember: your grief is a testament to the depth of your love for your community, and that is the most important resource at your fingertips. Use it.

I need you to know that it won’t be easy. But I also need you to know that we will win.

With all of my aging trans heart,
in memoriam and defiance,

Jude Ashburn

A (Critical) Land Acknowledgement

I cannot consider discussing research, education, or health care systems, without acknowledging the fact that I am a non-Indigenous person working on unceded and unsurrendered Anishinabek, Algonquin territory, and therefore have the responsibility to honour the Indigenous peoples who are the original defenders and protectors of this land upon which I am a guest. Indigenous women and Two Spirit people continue to lead the resistance against colonization, imperialism, settler-colonialism, systemic white supremacy, and capitalist ecocide, and I wish to situate this work within a framework of accountability to my role in these projects. Under neoliberal colonialism, land acknowledgements have rapidly become a site of performative allyship which generally only serves to maintain oppressive hegemony by positioning the oppressor as self-aware. These acknowledgements, however, are rarely paired with any systemic action to unsettle the colonial control which created the conditions in the first place, so their function is typically hollow and self-serving. This land acknowledgement is a basic modelling of transparency around whiteness and settler privilege; there is a great need for transphobia and colonization to be understood as mutually-informing mechanisms of subjugation, and to be confronted as such, as Indigenous peoples have always done.

There is nothing that I can say here that hasn't already been said by Indigenous, Black, and racialized trans people who continue to lead the movement against colonial white supremacist gender violence, capitalism, and environmental destruction. I will refer back to their work at every opportunity because my goal here is to contribute only to a gender discourse that recognizes and accounts for its connection to white supremacy. White academics and activists have no moral authority on the experiences of QTBIPOC[12] struggles for liberation and our

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[1] Queer, trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Colour.

efforts to appropriate them only serve to maintain dominance and oppression. It is incumbent upon us who wish to address gender mechanisms within education to account for our unearned but highly self-benefitting socio-political privilege which often results in a revisionist and assimilationist telling of socio-political histories and movements.

As a trans settler I occupy two intersecting realities; one as a marginalized person whose gender variance seriously affects their ability to access life-sustaining services and supports, and also as a white settler, who enjoys the social, political, and legal privilege of living on occupied and unceded Indigenous land under white supremacy. Harsha Walia (2014) writes about the need to move beyond a politic of solidarity towards a practice of decolonization, and I agree with this argument, however as a guest on this land I have no ethical authority on the subject of what the decolonial future could and should look like. I do, however, have the responsibility to take action now, in this life, to confront the legacies and systems which continue to oppress and destroy this planet, its original caretakers, and the dream of generations to come. I have the opportunity to redefine my own humanity along the lines of accountability, mutual aid, and collective responsibility. I write this portfolio in the hopes of complicating some of the Western gender and queer theory that is normalized within predominantly white settler LGBTQ+ spaces, and of course, to resist some of the genocidal Canadian government's national branding strategies and rhetoric that work to present Canada as a "safer place" for 2S and LGBTQ+ [3] peoples.

My work with 2S and LGBTQ+ youth, as well as my lived experience as a member of the community, has shown me that trans and gender diverse students face an additional level of shame just for existing and being who they are in a world intent on minimizing them. There have been many studies about the disproportionate labeling of 2S and LGBTQ+ kids as "unteachable", and the effects of shame can be profound. Cozolino (2012) calls on teachers to “go to the back of the room and teach from where these children try to hide” (95), and I have to say that so much of my own teaching work with trans and gender expansive youth is about becoming a support to them-- a safe connection that can help them safely out of isolation by building trust. I do this by working to build a sense of power and agency to counter the effects that shame can have on a student's sense of self, and therefore, ability to learn. Representation matters; bringing in content, facilitators, curriculum, and visual imagery of their community helps them have a sense of belonging and visibility. Asking about their boundaries- and then respecting them- helps too. And because shame is highly correlated with depression, violence, eating disorders, and suicide, it is no small importance to learn some trauma-informed practices that can stop the ongoing shaming of youth as well. It is precisely along this line of thought that I wish to draw attention to the importance of representation within educational systems, at all levels. Students cannot be what they cannot see (Darnieder, Duncan & McLaughlin, 2018).

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[3] For the sake of clarity and consistency, I will use "2S and LGBTQ+" throughout this portfolio to refer to Two Spirit and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer- plus, to signify a reference to this diverse group of peoples who all experience distinct but often overlapping social experiences and community. Two Spirit peoples are deliberately placed before LGBTQ+ in an effort to prioritize the sovereignty and leadership of Indigenous gender and sexual diversity, a topic which I explore throughout this work.

Chapter 1: We're Still Here

Revolutionary American trans activist and elder, Miss Major, has said that even in spite of every effort to stop trans people from doing so, that "we are still here" (as cited in Willis, 2018). She has been fighting against transphobia, anti-Blackness, misogynoir[4], police brutality, and just about every other form of violence for over 50 years. When she speaks about her thoughts on how to do this work, after all of this time, she tends to highlight her work building homes with other Black and racialized trans women as the crux of her methodology. For every protest, she made a meal for her sisters afterwards. For every act of violence inflicted upon her or her sisters, she held a healing space where her chosen family could recuperate and love each other, where they could build strength from each other, and move forward in the only way they knew how: together. Miss Major's legacy is one of love, in the truest sense of the word. She exemplifies the kind of unbreakable, hard-earned confidence that comes from somebody who has had every effort made against her life but whom has come out victorious, courageous, more ferocious, and somehow still gentle even in spite of the violence. We are still here. I draw attention to Miss Major's work because it represents the type of liberatory and collaborative dedication that we, as educators, ought to aspire to.

This portfolio is written in the hopes of contributing to a growing conversation around what it means to a) be a trans and/or gender diverse student in 2019 in Ontario[5], and b) what it means to be socially and politically-engaged teacher who is committed to supporting trans and gender diverse students in the here and now. The Ford government's removal of the sexual education curriculum as soon as he took office represents a rise in recent and ongoing attacks against trans student's livelihood. By reverting the curriculum back to its outdated and irrelevant 1998 iteration, the Ford government removed all mention of gender identity, effectively erasing anybody who is not cisgender and/or heterosexual. Over the last year, this same administration has consistently taken steps to remove any content from schools which speaks to the experiences of trans students (Jones, 2019). Lyra Evans, who is the first openly trans board trustee in Canada, has been organizing with the Ottawa-Carlton District School Board to address these attacks and bring back a sexual health curriculum that actually meets the needs of its students (The Canadian Press, 2018). As trans educators and community organizers, Lyra and I have worked together to form the first trans student caucus within the school board, in an effort to amplify the voices of students whose voices might otherwise be minimized or ignored by systemic transphobia, binarism, and cissexism. Educators must be vividly cognizant of these types of systemic attacks against their students and take strategic, harm reductionist actions in order to support their students.

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[4] The term 'misogynoir' was coined in 2008 by Black queer digital humanities scholar Moya Bailey to describe the personal and collective experiences of Black women and feminized peoples who contend with the intersection of anti-Blackness and misogyny. Bailey has recently written about her experiences of erasure and intellectual appropriation of this concept within the academy, which speaks to the ongoing whitewashing of Black queer and feminist scholarship (Bailey & Trudy, 2018).

[5] Ontario is the colonized name for the region encompassing a vast terrain of Anishinabek and Métis territories. When referring to specific cities, I will reference the Traditional names of the lands I am referring to as well.

As a trans-identified teacher and student who comes from a background of community-based education models and grassroots, peer-supported learning, I know that teachers can take many forms. Whether within the formal public education system or outside of it, teachers have always been in a uniquely political position to impact the lives of their students, and as a result, many aspects of their communities. I explore the political conservatism that exacerbates this uniquely political positionality, and offer up a framework for a critical trans pedagogy of education which calls on teachers to make a deeper, more loving commitment to our role in the lives of this specific group of marginalized students.

This portfolio addresses the guiding question: *What can teachers and administrators do to support trans students?* With a grounding in self-reflexivity and embodied knowledge acquired from lived experience, I provide an introductory timeline of oppressive gender paradigms and colonial projects of binarism which historicize and contextualize the current political climate of systemic transphobia. By situating this work within the contemporary rise in fascistic government policies targeting gender diverse peoples, my portfolio signals a path for educators who wish to traverse a rather frightening political, social, and environmental terrain by teaching in solidarity with marginalized people, trans people among them. Through a comprehensive literature review, glossary, self-situated analysis, and introductory workshop curriculum for teachers who wish to re/unteach gender in the classroom and beyond, I argue for a trauma-informed, anti-colonial, care-based pedagogy of teaching which follows in the tradition of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), respectively.

Schools are key sites in which normative gender identities and practices are legitimized. Within the mainstream colonial public education system in Canada, gendered practices can be identified from the first day of school and then continue throughout a student's entire learning career. The intellectual, emotional, social, and political effects of these gendered codes result in a normalized culture of binaries and power inequities. Through gender-segregated schooling practices, cisheteronormative curriculum, school rituals, everyday practices, and interactions between students and educators, the colonial gender binary of man/woman is upheld and functions as a cage for anybody who does not consent to it. Schools are also where many trans students begin to discover and understand their trans identities. So, while educators are not the only ones who contribute to a school's overall safety, nor to the gendered norms which are produced and reproduced by the school's culture, they are in a useful position to take a firm stance against transphobia, binarism, and cissexism.

While I strongly believe that true equity within education is not be possible until there is representation from gender diverse, Black, Indigenous, racialized, and differently abled leadership at all levels, I also recognize that oftentimes, efforts to "diversify" a work place or institution can function inadvertently to maintain the status quo and uphold white supremacy and other forms of oppression (Sleeter, 2016; Abawi, 2018). As Haddix (2017) aptly points out: "simply recruiting more teachers of color but doing nothing to change the current system would be a failure. Instead, this model would expect teachers of color to come into a system that has historically failed them as students. Why would one expect this same system to do anything other than fail them as teachers?" (p. 145). It is crucial that marginalized students see themselves reflected on a cultural level, within the curriculum, and within the staff at the schools where they learn; just as it is crucial that we as educators who are committed to combatting oppression recognize the limitations of reformist, Band-Aid approaches to systemic issues.

My literature review, as one piece of this portfolio, surveys contemporary gender identity and inclusion policy frameworks, contextualized by recent Ontario government attacks against such curriculum, highlighting the youth activism advocating for sexual and gender justice supports. This literature review can be used as a resource to educate members of committees, board members, and trustees who are implicated within the processes which affect the lives of trans students. Nicolazzo (2017) writes about the plethora of institutional barriers trans and gender diverse students are forced to navigate on a daily basis:

> Trans students are forced to navigate the individual and institutional instances that create structural oppression. Examples of these forms of oppression include intercollegiate athletics that are set up along the false dichotomy of men's and women's teams, reinforcing the cultural unintelligibility of trans people (structural); and institutions internal forms and documents with two check boxes for gender (man and woman), giving the impression there are only these two discrete options (institutional); and a student being harassed for their gender identity by another student or a group of students (individual) (p. 32).

While I, following Nicolazzo, seek here to educate teachers, administrators, and all other members of the school system about the need for gender equity, I also recognize that gender is a function of larger units of political power, and therefore more complex than any one individual operating within a system. I wish to illuminate a particular type of gender xenophobia, or rather, fear of gender diversity that is not white, Christian, and European which is prevalent throughout settler spaces, and is therefore superimposed upon countless cultures, their beliefs, and their histories. This fear works to systematically erase the existence of any gender variance outside of its own paradigm.

The historical and ongoing legacies of institutionalized transphobia, cissexism, compulsory heterosexuality, and binarism inherent within the colonial education system not only impedes the learning of trans and gender diverse students, but it also contributes significantly to the discrimination and suicidality that they face on a daily basis (Bauer & Scheim, 2015). Furthermore, within the contemporary political climate of spreading far-Right governments and policy, education systems have become an even larger microcosm for the world's injustices (Giroux, 2017). While formal education has always been foundationally colonial, efforts to weed out overt mechanisms of oppression are becoming more difficult every day (Giroux, 2019). As we see in Ontario, as well as Alberta and many other parts of Canada, there has been a significant increase in overt, Trump-era white supremacist violence, which effects all areas of the lives of students, workers, and peoples attempting to outlive and overturn such violence. It is no coincidence that gendered violence increases during these times of rising fascism, as heteropatriarchy is essential to both the development as well as the maintenance of the nation-state (Smith, 2006, 2016). Where there is white supremacy, there is a foundation of gender hierarchy as a means of social dominance. And with this kind of environment, the increase in factors contributing to suicide rates for trans teens skyrockets.

The situation is this: trans students face severe barriers to education (Beemyn, Goldberg & Smith, 2019), health care (Amsler, Davy, & Duncombe, 2015; Brightwell, 2016), employment, housing, and social supports- and these experiences are multiplied for Black, Indigenous, and trans youth of colour (Frohard-Dourlent, 2017). These circumstances are hardly conducive to a positive learning environment, let alone any quality of life. The impact of gender essentialism and gender xenophobia has profound effects on the mental health of trans peoples and communities, and it also functions as a sorting tool for students who become othered through these educational systems.

As noted by Sharman (2016), “it doesn’t take a PhD or a medical degree to figure out that experiencing discrimination is lousy for your health” (p. 14). Because trans people face an additional level of pathologization on their gender identities and expressions than their cisgender peers (Sharman, 2016), it is urgent that educators inform themselves of these violent histories of medical oppression which continue to operate today and create additional barriers to learning and overall wellness for trans youth. The wellness of trans youth in general indicates the overall health and status of the culture in which they live. When I say that trans people have been and continue to be pathologized, I am referring to the histories and ongoing processes of hyper-medicalization, demonization, and violent structural views of gender variance.

The history of pathologization and gender essentialism is also the history of fascism itself, which I will explore in some detail in my literature review. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) completed a multi-year process of revising the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5, APA, 2013). The DSM-5 is the name of a manual that nearly every trans person is familiar with because it signifies the legacies of transphobia presented by the colonial Eurocentric health care system. This manual is responsible for labelling gender variance of any kind as deviant, and as a diagnosis, as opposed to a diverse plethora of subjectivities and experiences. Trans people fought to remove these categorizations for decades, and it is within this latest DSM-5 revision process that the gender diagnoses were retained, albeit in altered form and bearing the new name of 'gender dysphoria' (Bauer & Rotondi, 2011). The conceptualization of trans self-identification as some sort of psychiatric disorder has lasting effects on the lives of gender diverse people today, so much so that school policies are only beginning to address the issue of recognizing the very existence of trans youth whatsoever. Given the pathologizing tendencies within health and education which position trans learners as "other", it is common for many trans students to slip through the proverbial cracks at their schools, which results in inequitable learning opportunities, among other harms.

Challenging Settler Politics of Gender and Sexuality

Within the colonial education systems in Canada, gender variance has always been punished, pathologized, and policed, which results in myriad levels of intergenerational trauma for trans, Two Spirit, and gender diverse youth. Such systems are deeply invested in maintaining the gender binary, which is a colonial construct in and of itself, as a category of power and social hierarchy which maintains colonization (Driskill, 2011). Indigenous expressions of Two Spirit identity challenge the colonial gender binary and inform the teaching of educators who wish to engage with critical, intersectional, anti-oppressive teaching methodologies (Lugones, 2008). Western gender discourse fails to fully account for its connection to white supremacy and colonization. It also results in the creation of socio-political hierarchies within communities of gender diverse peoples within and outside of educational spaces. Ma-Nee Chacaby (2016), a Two Spirit lesbian Ojibwa-Cree Elder based in Thunder Bay, Ontario, wrote a compelling memoir about her experiences of survivance[6] and self-determination. She writes:

> My kokum explained that two-spirit people were once loved and respected within our communities, but times had changed and they were no longer understood or valued in the same way. When I got older, she said, I would have to figure out how to live with two spirits as an adult. She warned me I probably would experience many hard times along the way (p. 65).

Chacaby details numerous experiences of intergenerational violence and traumatic events that she experienced due to the effects of colonization, such as numerous sexual assaults, addiction, physical violence, and violent colonial education systems. These experiences effectively served as roadblocks to not only her livelihood, but also her ability to learn, both within colonial school systems as well as Traditional learning spaces.

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[6] Brayboy (2008) defines survivance as the amalgamation of survival and resistance, saying “one cannot survive as an Indigenous person without resisting” (p. 342).

Pinkwashing has been theorized as the tactic deployed by those in power to present themselves as LGBT-friendly while covering up the human rights abuses they have (and continue to) commit against LGBT+ peoples. Dozono (2017) writes that "queer modernities (such as two-spirit) are at odds with forms of Western queer identities, which remain adherent to homonationalism and settler colonialism, continuing histories of policing and defining indigenous bodies according to European ways of knowing" (p. 444). Homonationalism can be understood as strategies used by the state to make 2S and LGBTQ+ rights synonymous with nationalistic projects. We needn't look any further than Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's recent "official apology" to 2S and LGBTQ+ Canadians (Khandaker, 2017) to see homonationalism in action; hidden behind the veneer of progressive national rhetoric, and no doubt cashing in on Trump-era rise of fascism, Canada attempts to brand itself a progressive next door neighbour and beacon of cultural sensitivity. This official apology made no mention of returning stolen lands, or the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two Spirit peoples, or the openly discriminatory blood ban against gay blood donors, or our ongoing support of the illegal occupation of Palestine, among other examples of colonial foreign policies.

This performative action by the Canadian government was tokenistic, at best (Exner-Pirot, 2019). Considering how Two Spirit and Indigenous peoples continue to disproportionately suffer from gender-based and sexual violence, higher rates of substance use disorders (SUD), trauma, economic violence, environmental racism, policing and incarceration, and suicide, it is unacceptable that they continue to be left out of local and national LGBTQ+ discourse and movements (Maynard, 2017). Symbolic gestures upon which colonial governments grandstand only serve to maintain their efficacy. Performative allyship therefore describes the superficial and self-aggrandizing behaviours enacted by people with privilege who espouse values of solidarity while taking little-to-no tangible actions against oppression. This type of performance often masquerades as progressive while enjoying all of the benefits of socio-political hegemony[7].

How Sociopolitical Trauma Impacts Learning Processes

While there are many complex and varied responses to the type of collective trauma experiences by trans students, four common effects are anxiety, hypervigilance, fear, and shame (Fearing, Matthews & Parkhill, 2014). These responses are a form of self-preservation that can protect students who are navigating a very scary world, but they can also be a box within which many trans students become trapped, and therefore denied the care, support, and access that they deserve. Karcher (2017) describes how their practice as an art therapist strives to honour the realities of people who experience high levels of societal oppression in regard to their gender identity, among other socio-political identities. They discuss the increase in hate crimes under the current political climate of far-right governments across the West, and how this is a daily reality amongst a sea of other microaggressions faced by trans youth.

> I witnessed many young transgender clients' anxieties increase as they questioned whether they would be allowed to use bathrooms that aligned with their gender identity, or whether they would even be protected from violence at school. At the same time, transgender adult clients expressed increased fear of harassment when using gender-designated facilities. Although the fight for transgender rights has led to increased visibility and is seen as positive, it has also increased the

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[7] Hegemony is a concept and term coined by Italian community Antonio Gramsci, and is used to describe the “manufacturing of consent” produced by the capitalist state (1971). I use the term here as a part of my educational praxis to denote the dominant oppressive social order.

> vulnerability of transgender people. The risk of increased visibility of transgender people falls disproportionately on those with multiple marginalized identities (e.g., people of colour, people with disabilities, undocumented immigrants, people living in poverty, transfeminine people, etc.) who are least protected from discrimination in state and federal housing, health care, education, and employment (p. 125).

In this way, oppressed groups such as trans peoples have experiences in daily life that produce a type of chronic stress and lead over time to wear and tear on the body, which goes above and beyond the "flight-or-fight" response to acute stress. The daily microaggressions of being misgendered, referred to by the wrong name and/or pronoun, having no accessible washrooms or policies designed with one's safety in mind, struggling to access culturally-relevant care and support are but a few examples of the chronic stress experienced by gender diverse students. There are many unmistakable signs when a student does not feel safe such as, according to Shanker (2017, p. 7), "becoming withdrawn and subdued, emotionally volatile, overly anxious, highly impulsive, inattentive, easily distracted—or bullying/being bullied". Without a larger rethinking of how schools (and dominant culture) function around gender, the tensions and contradictions highlighted in these works leave educators navigating a complex cultural and institutional terrain, attempting to support trans and gender-nonconforming students with little consistent guidance on how to do so.

From my experience as a trans person who is both an educator and a student, the best way to teach students who have experienced this particular type of stress is, as Cozolino (2013) puts it, by presenting "interesting and relevant content in a safe and interpersonal context" (p. 45). I agree strongly with Cozolino's proposal here because it refers to the importance of culturally-relevant education as well as an emotionally-intelligent approach to teaching and learning. Much like Karcher (2017), I believe in building educational practices around "validating responses to societal oppression and trauma, externalizing oppressive messages, and building a sense of agency and power" (p. 124). There are several strategies for incorporating such trauma-informed practices into one's teaching practice.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of the following literature review, I wish to define a few of the terms that I use throughout this portfolio. The term "transgender" is, as suggested by Stroumsa (2014), "an adjective that has been widely adopted to describe people whose gender identity, gender expression, or behavior does not conform to what is socio-culturally accepted as, and typically associated with, the legal and medical sex to which they were assigned at birth" (p. 31). I will be using the abbreviated form of "trans" to refer to an umbrella group of people who identify in some way as gender diverse, outside of or beyond the gender that they were assigned at birth, between or beyond the gender binary, or in other ways disinterested/disenfranchised by the whole gender industry altogether. The abbreviated version, trans, is a term commonly used within the trans community, many of whom reject its full iteration and see it as a handed-down, medicalized term. Trans is useful in its ambiguity, if not also its expansiveness.

"Cisgender" refers to people whose gender identity currently aligns with the sex that they were assigned at birth, and who currently enjoy some of the unearned privileges inherited through a bio-essentialist gender classification system which posits cisgender people above trans people[8]. I use the abbreviated version, cis, throughout this portfolio to refer to cisgender peoples.

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[8] See: Trans Student Educational Resources: http://www.transstudent.org/definitions/

Cissexism refers to the privileging of cis identities over trans people, which results in the transphobia experienced by trans people.

When I use the term “transition,” I will in part be referencing some of the historical and contemporary medical and surgical options for reducing dysphoria, but also the process of transgressing/transforming/transcending gender identity as a means of self-determining. I want to argue that there is no singular nor universal definition of what it means to transition, and that each trans person’s story is valid. For some trans individuals this may include, but is not limited to, changing one’s assigned name, one’s gender marker, accessing hormones or surgeries, or some other means of social or medical service provision. Some individuals opt to access methods outside of the medical system to reduce their dysphoria, such as binding or wearing enhancers, and changing their presentation. None of these things make a person more or less trans because, a) our transness belong to us and only us, b) our bodies are a fraction of who we are, and all bodies are inherently valid, c) transness does not necessarily occur in the body for everybody, and d) transness is profoundly subjective but also culturally, socially, historically, and politically coded across space and time.

Words such as “assessment” or “transition” are used sporadically and interchangeably in this literature review to refer to the process by which gatekeepers and people in positions of power within the medical, social, educational, and legal systems ascertain an individual trans person’s entitlement to receive health care. Despite the fundamental human right to self-identify, we exist in a society that perpetuates hierarchies based on race, status, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability, and as such, marginalized peoples such as trans folks are forced to justify and explain their gender(s) in order to receive health care in a way that more privileged peoples such as cis folks are not expected to.

“Two Spirit” (2S) refers to a plethora of Indigenous articulations and experiences of gender-nonconformity to settler-colonial notions of sexual and gender relations, roles, and identities (Binaohan, 2014). Gender-nonconformity can be used by 2S and trans people alike, and/or can be used to refer to any transgression of gendered social codes.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

"Everyone calls themselves an ally, until it is time to do some real ally shit"

(Xhopakelxhit, 2015).

In this literature review, I endeavor to resist the universalizing tone of much non-Indigenous literature found within the academy, and situate my own experience within these larger paradigms of social hierarchies in an effort to reduce any further appropriation of Queer and trans Indigenous, Black, and people of colour (QTBIPOC) social movement discourse. This literature review has three sections: the first provides an introduction to the coloniality of gender as a project of white supremacy; the second section is a historical glimpse of the medicalization of transgender identities, and gender-nonconformity itself, through the colonial gender binary and the state apparatus which rely upon it; and the final section locates the contemporary efforts to address transphobia and systemic cissexism within Canadian mainstream education systems.

I contextualize this literature review with the understanding that the medical model of transition as it currently exists across Turtle Island views dysphoria and gender identities outside of the man/woman binary as pathologies to be corrected, rather than inherently valid on their own terms and indicative of a diverse multiplicity of human experience. This system is also the very same system that has been used in the genocidal policies and intergenerational murder, subjugation, and oppression of Indigenous peoples and communities of colour around the globe. I believe that it is essential that we understand gender as a colonial construct, and prioritize the scholarship and activism of Indigenous, Black, and racialized trans and gender-nonconforming peoples if we wish to truly engage in anti-oppressive pedagogies.

In many respects, trans people are a form of living archives. Our existence functions as a mirror held up to the face of a colonial society which was built upon the very effort to erase us.

Everything that a trans student experiences is a reflection of the culture in which they live at that precise moment in a dynamic historical process. As such, a politicized understanding of precisely how transphobia came to be, as well as its ongoing iterations at all levels of society, must be taken into account. Trans politics continue to be redefined by trans communities engaged in revolutionary struggle, and they are in and of themselves a living, breathing, archive of resistance against oppressive regimes. I refer now to the two systems which typically impact the majority of trans people in some of the most significant ways: the colonial education system and the public health system. These two systems are deeply interconnected.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the gender binary is a colonial construct, heavily informed by Christian patriarchy, and it is used to maintain colonization. Pre-colonial social structures did not reflect a gender binary of man/woman and it is crucial to historicize and contextualize the damages inflicted by Euro-Christian colonization of diverse Indigenous nations, knowledges, and traditions in order to identify current gendered and racialized mechanisms deployed by colonial institutions and the state. Lugones (2008) writes about the ways in which these changes were “introduced through slow, discontinuous, and heterogeneous processes that violently inferiorized colonized women” (p. 13). She writes about the ways in which subjugation of women and reproduction is a standard tactic of any invading state, as it is the first way of obtaining primary control. In Andrea Smith’s (2006, 2016) influential essay on The Three Pillars of White Supremacy, the author describes the ways in which heteropatriarchy is essential to both the development as well as the maintenance of the nation-state (p. 71), and this framework can be used as a tool through which to study other Indigenous feminist writings on the gendered nature of Western colonization.

Andrea Smith (2012) goes on to write that "...in order to colonize peoples whose societies are not based on social hierarchy, colonizers must first naturalize hierarchy through instituting patriarchy. In turn, patriarchy rests on a gender binary system in which only two genders exist, one dominating the other" (pp. 69-70). This connection is of the utmost importance in the historicizing of the colonial gender binary, because it not only limits gender to a binary of only two options, but also constructs all gender relations as inherently hierarchical, and in competition for dominance over one another. In a zine produced for a workshop series about decolonizing gender curriculums, Jackson and Shanks (2017) describe precisely how "European colonization worked to impose the gender binary in order to create hierarchies in non-hierarchical societies so they could better divide and conquer the people" (17). They go on to posit that we must trace the logic of capitalism and imperialism in order to understand "the way that white supremacy has set gender up for us" (14). Smith's (2006) descriptions of the ways in which the Christian heteropatriarchal family-unit functions as micro versions of the colonial state speak to these mechanisms. The acquisition of land, power, and resources is therefore synonymous with the categorization and control of gender and sexuality.

Colonization is dependent upon patriarchy as a naturalized social order, which depends on a hierarchical binary of men above women, and white people above Black and people of colour, settlers above Indigenous peoples, and so on. As such, as noted by Smith (2016), "any liberation struggle that does not challenge heteronormativity cannot substantially challenge colonialism or white supremacy" (p. 72). Both Black feminist and Indigenous feminist writings on the subject of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2016) highlight the importance of understanding the ways in which various individual positions (such as race, class, sexual orientation) intersect with other identities, and how these overlapping realities inform and complicate each other within the context of systemic hierarchies. The need for an intersectional approach to gender and queer theory has long since been described by feminists of colour, positing that any feminism without a race analysis is merely a reflection of white supremacy[9]. Therefore, in the context of occupied Turtle Island, the ability of the colonial ruling class to dictate, define, and control Indigenous identity based on white supremacist cisheteropatriarchal binaries has numerous effects on the ability of said communities to claim and reclaim stolen identities. Both Walia (2014) and Lawrence (2003) point to the ways in which Indigenous identity is constructed by the colonial state according to racist and sexist belief systems. Lawrence tells of how the "central aspect of the colonization process has been the development of systems of classification and regulation of Native identity…according to racist and sexist criteria" (pp. 23-24). Lawrence describes how North American settler governments homogenize "hundreds of different nations, ethnicities, and language groups to a common raced identity as 'Indian'" (pp. 4-5) for the purposes of positioning themselves atop of the societal hierarchy. The gendered nature of this discourse can also be seen in the ways that the 1876 Indian Act targets women by forcing them from their communities for marrying non-status or non-Indigenous men.

Citing the examples such as the gendered divisions of Canada's 1876 Indian Act, Morgensen (2011) explains how "Indigenous elimination manifestly proceeds through settler regulation of sexual relations, gender identity, marriage, reproduction, and genealogy, and all similar means for restricting resistant indigenous national difference" (p. 10). These laws divided women from status, denied reproductive autonomy, and re-organized numerous Indigenous societies according to patrilineal, patriarchal colonial values. Morgensen (2011) describes how this “eliminatory logic of settler governance manifests… as inventing and recognizing ‘Indian status’ precisely created a basis for erasing indigeneity within the horizon of settler society” (p. 10). The categorization of identities into homogenous groups therefore serves to reduce, assimilate, or altogether erase anybody who fails to perform or subscribe to white settler masculinity.

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[9] This phenomenon has widely been referred to as white feminism. See: "Disrupting White Feminism", Showing Up for Racial Justice (2019), https://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/white-feminism.html.

All binaries must be understood within the context of their creation and functionality. What purposes do they serve? Why were these borders drawn? Jackson and Shanks (2017) detail how “the binary is enshrined in laws that are usually used to prosecute people of color, especially people who existed outside of the gender binary” (p. 16), citing examples such as the “gendered cages” of prisons, groups homes, residential schools, and of course, the gendered division of the Indian Act and its subsequent policies (p. 18). Their work echoes some of Andrea Smith’s (2006, 2016) writings on the binaries inherent to white supremacy, such as “slavery logic” which is based on a black/white binary, and maintains Blackness as the bottom of the color hierarchy, as well as the “Indigenous/settler binary, where Native genocide is central to the logic of white supremacy and other non-indigenous people of color also form “a subsidiary” role” (pp. 69-71). Historicizing the political, gendered, and raced divisions of the gender binary helps contextualize Indigenous resistance to colonization.

Binaohan’s (2014) book describes how the gender binary is a colonial construct, and that the logic of colonization is such that is produces narratives wherein gender and sexuality are fixed, universal, homogenous, categorizable experiences, when in reality a multiplicity of gender and sexual diversity exists across many cultural traditions, and that human nature and relationships cannot and should not be dictated according to colonial worldviews. By contextualizing and historicizing Indigenous gender systems which illuminate Two Spirit and other Indigenous gender realities, they describe the ways in which non-binary and queer Indigenous peoples present a direct threat to colonial cisheteropatriarchal norms. While the colonial gaze tends to either romanticize or misrepresent these Indigenous histories, the fact remains that gender variance has existed and persisted for generations without the anthropological worldview of Western settlers. This perspective is crucial to the contextualization and conceptualization of the contemporary colonial education system's efforts (or lack thereof) to support gender diverse students.

Smith (2010) writes about the ways in which Native Studies and Western queer and gender theory departments are siloed and separated by colonial hegemony and snobbery. She argues that "Native studies can be part of a growing conversation of scholars engaged in diverse intellectual projects that do not dismiss identity but structure inquiry around the logics of race, colonialism, capitalism, gender, and sexuality. Native studies must be part of this conversation because the logics of settler colonialism structure all of society, not just those who are indigenous" (pp. 43-44). It is important that all educators recognize their role in confronting "exclusionary education as it exists today" (Wane, 2013, p. 105). This can only be done by Indigenizing the curriculum and following Two Spirit and trans leadership.

Understanding the gender roles and sacred community positionality of Two Spirit peoples prior to colonization is pivotal to understanding the diversity and significance of gendered social structures within Indigenous knowledge systems. Many Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ Indigenous scholars have written about the ability to self-determine gender roles in various Indigenous communities, and how these community roles were (and continue to be, in many cases) informed by a sense of collective responsibility and mutuality. This notion of gender exists within Indigenous worldviews centered around mutuality, interconnectedness, and collective sovereignty. Cameron (2005) writes that “prior to European contact, many (but not all) Aboriginal groups had two-spirit members who were integral parts of the community, occupying positions of honor and communal value… Aboriginal sexuality was based on multiple genders, at least three, but up to six. Some groups conceived of six genders” (pp. 123-124). Many of these pre-colonial Indigenous societies were also matriarchal and matrilineal, governed by clan mothers who could elect and remove chiefs according to their assessment of his qualifications (Jamieson, 2005, par. 6). This range of gender experience, relationality, performativity, and determination directly contradicts the Euro-colonial imposition of a two-gender, hierarchical and patriarchal system. Dozone (2017) writes:

> Part of the contextualization that must happen in the present is with the term “gender identity.” Gender identity is a contemporary construct, embedded within a Western and contemporary notion of identity politics that underscores the individual’s autonomy over their identity. In many Western societies, individual identities are the central unit of political power, as in ‘one-person-one-vote’. However, many societies focus on larger family units or clans as the main unit of political power. Gender can become a function of those larger units of political power, and less focused on the individual (p. 435).

Colonization functions to assert settler dominance over Indigenous lives by dividing (land, communities, peoples, relationships, identities) and conquering (resources, people, land, capital).

Two Spirit peoples present a direct threat to the colonial cisheteropatriarchal order and its binaristic worldview, which is precisely why they continue to be marginalized by colonial systems.

Two Spirit identities are incompatible with colonial logic and gender relations. Dozono (2017) writes that “in order to break with the ways white European anthropologists have produced knowledge about Indigenous peoples, many Native American LGBTQ people have turned to the term ‘Two Spirit’” (p. 439). This term has been defined and redefined across time by Indigenous intellectuals and knowledge keepers, but generally it has been used to describe an Indigenous experience of gender and/or sexuality that, according to Elm, Lewis, Walters & Self (2016), “has been known to facilitate an individual's reconnection with tribal understandings of non-binary sexual and gender identities, as well as traditional spiritual or ceremonial roles that two-spirits have held, thus reaffirming their identities” (p. 343). It is important to note the ways in which the term Two Spirit, for Indigenous peoples, is “a part of our counter-hegemonic discourse and reclamation of our unique histories” (Cameron, 2005, p. 123). When understood in this way, the term Two Spirit exists as a means of reclamation, survivance, and returning to pre-colonial gender and sexual relations, outside of the colonial gaze and jurisdiction.

Trans Health Care?

The World Professional Association for Transgender Health Standards of Care (WPATH) is the model upon which trans healthcare in Canada is based, and it makes only a brief reference to the fact that many cultures have different systems of gender, and provides no reference whatsoever to the processes of violence and colonization that facilitated the spread of the Western Euro-Christian gender binary. The failure of Western education to research the health disparities faced by trans and gender diverse populations translates into physicians who are ill-equipped to serve the needs of these populations. The lack of data causing demand for these services to be invisible may be one factor, but another is societal stigma. A critical review of the literature and research on trans health education shows a dire need for anti-oppressive, trans-informed, and gender diverse education for students training to become health professionals, the need for a multifaceted standards of care for these educational curricula, more and better research on the disproportionate barriers facing trans people in contemporary Western society, and a paired commitment to policies and actions that strive towards paradigm shifts and social change.

The World Professional Association of Transgender Health (WPATH) was originally named the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association, after Harry Benjamin, MD (1885-1986)[10], whose 1966 book, The Transsexual Phenomenon, was one of the first books within the field of medical literature to identify trans people in any explicit way. Benjamin believed that "transsexualism" is a medical condition arising from a developmental disconnect between brain and assigned gender. Benjamin made the original proposition that trans people are "trapped in the wrong body" and therefore in his opinion, they required "treatment" to correct this mismatch on brain development and assigned gender. He proposed a combination of hormone replacement therapy (HRT; e.g., testosterone blockers and estrogen) and gender reassignment surgery (e.g., GRS). Benjamin is responsible for the "gender identity scale" as well as the original standards of care that would go on to become the WPATH standards, which are still in use today.

While I will not get into the cissexist and ableist assumptions of this framework of thinking, I want to mention that Benjamin and other doctors secretly opened the first sex reassignment clinic in the United States at Johns Hopkins University (May 2016). The Hopkins Gender Identity Clinic was made up of plastic surgeons, psychiatrists, psychologists, a gynecologist, a urologist, and a pediatrician. May (2016) goes on to detail how the clinic shifted in political climate over the 1960's and into the 1970's, which changed the way that research was conducted based on varying ontological, epistemological and methodological perspectives and their implications in research practice at the time. They also write that "despite its prohibitive barriers to entry -not to mention the long-term damage of Meyer's (pathologizing) assertions- the clinic was a place that took trans people seriously in a time when that was extremely rare. What we know now is that most transition-related health care is now performed in private clinics, outside of academic medical institutions, which not only creates barriers for trans people who need to access the care, but it also historicizes today's lack of medical students and health professionals who do not make this care a priority in their careers. The 'Benjamin Model', which was coined by Harry Benjamin in 1966, trickled down into the World Professional Association of Transgender Health framework for criteria and assessment; the traits laid out by Benjamin in 1966 to define what it means to be trans are still used to pathologize and gatekeep trans people today.

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[10] See: World Professional Association for Transgender Health, https://www.wpath.org/.

The standards of care created by WPATH functions as an international consensus around current knowledge for clinicians who work with trans patients. The most recent version was released on September 25th, 2011, which made it the seventh edition since its origination in 1979 (WPATH website, 2011). The WPATH Standards of care is crucial in its unique importance, albeit imperfect in its monopoly on the subject of trans health. As noted in the above terms of reference section, the WPATH Standards of Care (2011) has finally acknowledged the constantly-evolving language regarding gender identity and expression. Stroumsa (2014) writes about how the shifting public discourses and professional debates have moved towards an understanding of gender diversity and nonconformity as different and separate from mental illness, saying that gender nonconformity, or a desire to express gender in ways that differ from gender-cultural norms linked to sex assigned at birth, was until very recently considered a mental pathology by the psychiatric community (p. 35). These findings by Stroumsa and other similar researchers articulate a prevailing problem across the field: that access to care is limited by the dearth of physicians who focus on, or are comfortable with, providing care for transgender people (Stroumsa, 2014), which is woefully insufficient.

Rebecca Hammond's Master of Science thesis (2010), while almost eight years old, provides some interesting historical context on the social organization of trans healthcare for youth, specifically, in Ontario. It is interesting to note that when they wrote their master's thesis, the DSM-V had not been released. The changes found within the DSM-V further contextualizes their findings and serves as an illuminating time capsule on the ever-shifting language of social theory, of gender categories, and of trans subjectivities. But what is perhaps most impactful about their findings is that it challenges the ways in which the researcher becomes the gatekeeper when it comes to trans individuals attempting to access health care services. Hammond (2010) warns about how "a great deal of 'health research' is undertaken in clinical settings by the same providers who are providing care" and points towards the power differences and implications for compromised clinical care by these gatekeepers who serve as "text-mediated authorities to determine the 'true' gender identity of another individual and, by extension, to permit that individual to receive trans care in order to actualize this gender identity" (p. 82). Hammond's work frames the body of research as a "fragmented ontological archive, where different disciplines hold radically different perspectives in relationship to 'gender identity' and 'trans' identities" as a means by which the researcher must "understand trans health care barriers and the production of trans marginalization" (2010, p. 7). Much of the problem lies within research that is informed by biases which reproduce the marginalization of diverse trans communities. The result is also a lack of professional resources for medical students to learn from, as well as a systematic lack of formal training on trans health. The fear of encountering gatekeepers prevents many trans people from accessing health care.

As mentioned earlier, the Trans Pulse project currently conducts the majority of organized research on the topic of trans health issues in Ontario (The Trans Pulse Project, 2019). Their 2009-2010 survey was a large-scale respondent-driven sampling and the only significant Ontario study for transgender health to date. Like most data on the transgender population, this study did not account for other people who identify outside the gender binary, such as non-binary people (Giblon & Bauer, 2017), but it did produce data that was generalizable for trans communities outside of the province. Based on the Trans Pulse Project study, 43.9% of transgender Ontarians reported unmet healthcare needs in the previous year, compared to 10.7% of the cisgender population (Giblon & Bauer, 2017, p. 3). In that same year, 21% of transgender Ontarians avoiding emergency services during a time of need because they were transgender (Bauer & Scheim, 2015). There are three main reasons transgender and gender-diverse individuals avoid health care services: negative previous experiences (experienced by 40% of those surveyed), fear of discrimination, and lack of affirming identification, long wait times and/or long-distance travel required to access health care (Bauer & Scheim, 2015). When little data exists, and existing data underrepresents the population in question, their needs can go unacknowledged by society and the system that is meant to serve them.

Various systems operate together to produce the conditions which oppress trans students. The medical industrial complex maintains social hegemony and informs policy, practice, and educational philosophies. Amsler et al. (2015) raise an excellent point when they critique the modern trend of "diversity and inclusion" policies which often translate into tokenistic, checkmark-style approach to education that often only serve as a Band-Aid, somewhat reductionist approaches to education. Their study "calls for a more systematic and integrated approach to the planning of incorporating LGBTQ content into curricula for medical health care and social work students" (p. 157). They call for a varied research focus on wider 2S and LGBTQ+ issues with an eye to larger structural causes for this gap in services and health equity.

Trans students continue to be socially positioned as burdensome just for existing, and it is our task as educators who are invested in social justice to counter this narrative at every turn. Beemyn et al. (2019) have conducted one of the most relevant contemporary surveys of trans-inclusive practices within higher education, and done so through the lens of trans students' perspectives on the usefulness and applicability of such policies on their lives as they move through these institutions. Their mixed-methods study of 507 trans and gender-nonconforming students was designed to explore precisely how the presence of trans-inclusive policies and supports relates to trans students' sense of belonging and safety. Measures such as gender-neutral washrooms and name change policies are explored, and the authors' findings overall indicate that religiously affiliated institutions tend to lag behind on measures such as these. Their research shows that the presence of trans-inclusive policies and supports was related to a greater sense of belonging and more positive perceptions of campus climate for trans students, as well as a deeper understanding of what can be done to transform the highly gendered, trans-exclusionary culture of college and university campuses.

In a similar study, Rayside (2014) discusses the uneven implementation of inclusive policies and protocols across various Canadian school systems, and how this leaves 2S and LGBTQ+ students at varying levels of risk, and therefore seriously impedes the creation of truly inclusive school spaces. The author explores the “appalling evidence of homophobic and transphobic school climates, which mirror societal norms” (p. 194), and calls for a vision of equity which includes the parents, culture, and societal mechanisms affecting the lives of students both inside and outside of the school environment. While the rising consciousness around gender and sexual diversity calls for such policies, there is a frequent lack of meaningful implementation due to the siloing of decision-making, and the need for more student involvement at all levels.

Research which prioritizes the experience of trans students’ role in the creation of policy and practices which affect their lives should be the norm by which all ethical research is conducted, but it often is not. Qualitative research methodologies such as narrative-based inquiry, participatory action projects, phenomenology and/or self-situated research takes an anti-oppressive pedagogical approach conducive to co-learning (Allen-Handy & Jackson, 2018). Frohard-Dourlent (2017)’s research analyses how 60 educators in British Columbia involved trans students in decision-making processes at their school, and how, by centering the expertise of trans students, cisnormativity was disrupted in their schools, and student-led change archived the changing institutional terrain of school-based conceptualizations of youth in general. This piece highlights some of the ways in which trans youth are imagined, characterized, pathologized, and policed by educational institutions. This work, and others like it, highlights the limitation of discourses which posit trans youth as perpetually ‘at risk’, and offers up a detailed archive of trans resiliency, power, self-determination, and collective skills.

There is a great need for more trans scholarship within the academy to counter some of the dominant cultural assumptions made by cis people about our lives. Nicolazzo’s (2017) work provides a detailed account of the creative strategies deployed by the students who create safety amongst themselves, despite daunting systemic barriers. The production of trans-related research within academia and student organizing has seen a relative surge in recognition over the past five years, but the result of these temporary bouts of academic interest is that they can reproduce pathologization, tokenization, fetishization, and cis supremacy. Garvey, Mobley, Moore & Summerville (2019) explore the experiences of QTBIPOC and how these students navigate the complex intersecting dimensions of race, sexuality, and gender during their time as university students. The researchers' findings assert that for many QTBIPOC folks, their choosing to be "out" is secondary or tangential to their racial identities. The participants' experiences also highlight the ways in which scholarship about 2S & LGBTQ+ issues often reflect a very white worldview of gender and sexuality, suggesting that the level of *outness* among QTBIPOC differs from that of white queer and trans students. This research speaks to the need for an explicitly anti-racist, anti-colonial framework of understanding in the institutional work of addressing cissexism and transphobia.

All of this research has little applicability if teachers and administrators are not committed to the dismantling of cissexism and transphobia. Frohard-Dourlent's (2017) work analyzes conversations between educators about their experiences supporting trans students; in a similar vein, Francis and Reygan (2015) explore the teaching of sexual diversity in schools with a particular focus on the need for teachers to unlearn and relearn emotions such as defensiveness, entitlement, compassion, and beyond. Both groups of researchers make a case for a "pedagogy of discomfort… which aims to reveal and question the profoundly rooted emotions that condition and shape daily routines, habits and that are often unconsciously complicit with power and hegemony" (p. 104). I believe that an emotionally-intelligent, holistic approach to the work of undoing institutional oppression is necessary and overdue, which is why I have opted to share two sample workshop templates for teaching critical gender pedagogies in the classroom and/or board room. These templates can be used by teachers, students, or administrators alike as an introduction to a self-reflective exercise in asking oneself how gender functions in society and within the culture of all institutions.

Chapter 3: Toolkit for (Un)teaching Gender in the Classroom and Beyond

An Introduction

As an educator who engages with both community-based and formalized education systems, I have found that students tend to learn best when they have chosen to learn something. There are so many ways in which our consent is never sought out by formal education systems, and I truly believe that this cumulative experience can become quite traumatic for many learners who never get the opportunity to develop a sense of agency in their learning because of it. When we are given a choice about *what* and *how* we are to learn something, the entire trajectory of our life shifts in rather profound ways because we are able to tell a new story about who we are in the world. The identity of student can take on new meaning. It is for this reason that I have been facilitating grassroots, free, educational workshops on a variety of anti-oppressive topics within the community for over a decade; because I believe this medium and format to be a useful, caring, and fruitful format for engaging with complex issues where participants can come and go of their own free will. No structure is perfect and I am still learning, re-learning, and unlearning which methodologies with which to do this work, but my commitment to community education is my commitment to a de-privatized, accessible, and liberatory tool-sharing ethos of education. When Audre Lorde (2012) said “the learning process is something you can incite, literally incite, like a riot” (p. 98), I know she meant it from a place of experience, and I share this experience and sentiment with her. I chose to design workshops for my Master of Education project because it comes from my experience of seeing the community effects of learning through collectively-built, safer environments. I chose the format of workshops because I believe that they are useful and ideally accessible to a variety of learners due to their easily adaptable template(s).

How can educators begin to unsettle the gender binary and teach about the colonial histories that bring about its formations? How might educators disrupt the carefully constructed mythologies of the Canadian government and take tangible actions against colonial violence? How might non-Indigenous teachers leverage our privilege in order to return resources that do not rightfully belong to us? Invariably, most efforts made by non-Indigenous peoples to articulate decolonization result in the metaphorization, abstraction, or dilution of its meaning. Tuck and Yang (2012) say that “decolonization brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools” (p. 1). When it comes to decolonizing gender and sexuality, Two Spirit and queer Indigenous scholars and activists continue to illuminate the limitations of the colonial binary. Dozone (2017), for instance, points out that when the Euro-Christian framework presents gender as a naturalized and “stable historical binary across world history” (p. 438), it impacts the global intelligibility of what is possible for human gender expression. Educators must encourage students to re-think the ways in which gender functions in society, and how their identities relate to these mechanisms.

It is the tendency of the Western academic industrial complex to ‘otherize’ Indigenous knowledges and relegate them to the margins. Colonial education systems treat these knowledges as special interest issues as opposed to core educational content and epistemological priorities. Iseke (2009) echoes the call for educators to seriously confront “their own Western paradigm to recognize its limits and come to understand that these limits are confining” (p. 379), because until Indigenous knowledges and peoples become “full partners in educational institutions” (p. 365), any efforts made by colonial educators tend towards tokenism, cultural appropriation, and intellectual theft.

Two Spirit cultural theorists and Indigenous scholars illuminate the fact that education is interwoven with politics and cannot be merely reformed without tangible systemic reparations. Decolonization cannot be defined by settler logic or Western conceptualization of oppression or anti-oppression. As Tuck and Yang (2013) say, “until stolen land is relinquished, critical consciousness does not translate into action that disrupts settler colonialism” (p. 19). Decolonizing gender means subverting the presence of imperialist cisheteropatriarchal gender norms and socio-political hierarchies which maintain white supremacy and state power. As Morgensen (2011) has written, “any naturalization of Western heteropatriarchy or binary sex/gender also naturalizes settler colonialism” (p. 13). Two Spirit peoples’ very existence presents a threat to the political fabric of colonized culture, which is precisely why Two Spirit peoples must remain at the forefront of decolonization. Educators who wish to support the work of decolonization needn’t look any further than their own classrooms and social networks for opportunities to shift power. Implementing curriculum and content which encourages self-reflexivity, works to historicize colonial histories, and questions the functionality of gender as it intersects with race and other forms of oppression would go a long way to support the non-white 2S and LGBTQ+ students who face emotional and psychological costs of difference within these institutions.

In British Columbia, the BC Trauma-Sensitive Toolkit (2017) outlines a blueprint for making schools trauma-sensitive, which they define as schools which promote “(a) feelings of physical, social, and emotional safety in students; (b) a shared understanding among staff about the impact of trauma and adversity on students; (c) positive and culturally responsive discipline policies and practices; (d) access to comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services; and (e) effective community collaboration” (“Collaborative Toolbox”, 2019). By naming their feelings and tapping into their embodied knowledge, the goal is that youth with trauma will be able to navigate their sociopolitical reality and critique the messages that undermine their capacity to feel safe in their everyday lives.

Why Workshops?

I have been a community educator and political organizer for over fifteen years. At this point in my personal and professional praxis, I can attest that workshops as a learning tool and medium provide an accessible entry point by which myriad learners at various points in their educational journeys can engage with complex content. As an educator who comes from a poor, working class background, I am committed to an ethic of *sharing what you have*, so it is precisely by this ethic that I strive to teach through principles and practices of mutual aid and collective care. I believe that knowledge must always be shared, de-privatized, and re-distributed according to need and ability. I have personally facilitated over a hundred of these sessions in my work coordinating community-based and university-based gender justice centers and 2S and LGBTQ+ youth initiatives, and what I have found is that participants value the peer-led component of workshops as a format. It also bears repeating that because teachers are in a position of power over our students, and in this way, our self-reflection is not only a right but also a responsibility. Our professional development is also a social and political accountability process, and we must remain committed to the work of lifelong learning and transparency.

It is necessary to deconstruct white trans and gender theory. Not only does Western gender discourse fail to fully account for its connection to white supremacy and colonization, it also results in the creation of socio-political hierarchies within communities of gender diverse peoples both within and outside of educational spaces. Wilson (2008) cites the tendency of white and settler North American anthropologists, as well as gay historians, to form a basis of cultural assumptions about sexuality and gender that is rarely informed by the lives of contemporary Two Spirit people (p. 193). This tendency serves to uphold narratives about gender and sexuality which ultimately maintain white supremacy and colonial logic. I am indebted to the Two Spirit and Indigenous colleagues and friends who took the time to read this work and provide insight that only comes from lived experience. It is my hope that this work contributes to a growing movement of radical educators returning to community and land-based modes of learning, teaching, and doing.

Chapter 4: Workshop Outlines

Workshop Outline #1: Trans 101 (1-2 hours, interactive)

Facilitator/teacher introduces themself. Share name and pronouns, any access needs they have that would allow them to participate in the space more fully. Share a bit about who they are and why they think this session is important. Ask all students/participants to do the same. It can be useful to start your workshop by creating a group agree, as in, a contract of group norms for engaging with the space. The intention of this agreement would be to create a safer, more accountable space in which people can work together productively. Essentially a group agreement is a set of statements that set the tone, intentions, responsibilities, and goals of the workshop and its participants.

Suggestions for facilitators: This subject matter is not simple, one-dimensional, or uncomplicated to grapple with. It is important when creating spaces that aspire to being harm reductionist and trauma-informed that we not only anticipate emotional responses, but also encourage them, as much as possible and within our professional limits. If possible, it is always beneficial to have counsellors present who can assist in emotionally-intelligent learning, as well as culturally-relevant caregivers, such as Elders or peer supports to be present for whomever might need them. Accessibility is crucial to this work; a good facilitator will encourage everybody to participate by creating the conditions within which they are able to. I recommend bringing in active listeners whenever possible. Sometimes important issues will arise and take much more time than you planned and in these instances, it is helpful to have some alternate activities planned. Ideally, the facilitator will do far less speaking than the participants, striving instead to encourage participant learning from each other and by themselves, with a focus on self-reflection so that they are more likely to remember and apply the lessons in their own lives.

It is also important as often as possible to build a rapport and establish some trust prior to these workshops as participants will be more likely to participate if they feel that the group is open to hearing their perspectives in a non-judgmental environment. I often say something to the effect of, "I may not be able to guarantee a fully safe space, but I can guarantee a brave space, whether we are all committed to being open, vulnerable, and transparent about our role and commitment to this work". While this also may vary according to the age demographic of the group, I find that adults work best when they have chosen to learn something voluntarily versus youth seem to learn best when they feel that their peers will support and not judge them. This is just based on my personal experience and perspective working primarily with 2S and LGBTQ+ communities, though.

Review of Terminology (as a group):

I recommend using the definitions developed at Trans Student Educational Resources (http://www.transstudent.org/about/definitions/, 2019), as they have been developed by trans students and can be adjusted according to the needs, dynamic, and constituents of your group. Each facilitator can and should pick which of the following terms feel most applicable to their group, based upon the identified needs or events which led up to its formation.

Gender identity
Sex assigned at birth
Gender roles
Gender binary
Cisgender
Trans/transgender
Genderqueer

Two Spirit

Homophobia

Sexism

Heterosexism

Transphobia

Cissexism

Trans misogyny

Racism

Oppression

In small groups (around 4 people), discuss: What is a preferred name and/or pronoun? What is the importance of using somebody's preferred name and pronouns? Is there a difference between gender identity and gender expression? If so, what are these differences? How do these vary according to social position, cultural context, time, space?

Look for: It shows respect; cis people have their names and pronouns respected without question and trans people deserve the same respect, dignity, visibility, equity, etc. Gender identity can be understood as how someone sees themselves, and gender expression is how they might present themselves and be seen by the world. The only correct way to identify somebody's gender identity is by asking, hence the importance of normalizing pronoun check-ins.

In the same groups, discuss: What is a good way to respond when you or somebody else misgenders someone, and/or uses the incorrect pronouns when addressing or referring to somebody?

Look for: Apologize and ask for their correct name and/or pronoun. Do not make a big spectacle of apologizing so as to make them feel uncomfortable or put them in a position where they need to comfort you or ease your guilt. Don't make it about yourself.

Returning to the whole group, discuss together: How would you deal with a friend, family member, or co-worker who has misgendered a trans person?

Look for: Gently correct them on the name and/or pronoun. If they are defensive or reluctant, take the time to talk to them privately. This work should be done by cis allies so that it does not fall on the trans person, who already deals with these daily microaggressions.

Closing the workshop: Ask participants to (silently, to themselves) reflect on one thing that they learned and one thing that they will do differently from now on. Have them journal/draw/reflect on their commitment to being peer learners with each other, so that they have other cis people to educate themselves with in the work of trans allyship. On a sheet of flip chart paper or chalkboard/white board, draw up a value proposition with a golden circle model or similar style of diagram, encourage participants to identify actions (ex: somebody was referred to by the wrong pronoun); reflections (ex: what might this mean for that person's safety?); application (ex: now what? What steps can I take to ensure this does not happen again?). Ask the group if they feel confident in their ability to identify some examples of workplace transphobia, either subtle or overt, then ask for a thumbs up/thumbs down feedback about their sense of ability to address it moving forward.

Workshop Outline #2: Gender is a Galaxy (2-3 hours, interactive, arts-based)

Materials: Flipchart, paper or canvasses of some kind for the work tables, markers and pencil crayons, glitter, any available art supplies that will encourage creative thinking. I also recommend bringing in "fidgets" of some kind if the participants are youth, which can be anything from spinners to teddy bears, toy slime, or any other sensory-stimulating and supportive items which can be held by youth to foster grounding.

Process: Facilitator introduces themself, shares their name, pronoun, and access needs. They should provide some context as to how and why this workshop came to be, as well as their personal stake in the issue. Go around in a circle and ask participants/students to do the same. After everybody has had their turn introducing themselves, ask the group to pick up a piece of paper and a writing utensil.

First question (to be answered individually on their sheet of paper, 5 minutes): What is the first thing you remember being told about your gender?

Follow-up questions (still reflecting silently with themselves, 2-4 minutes per question):

What is gender?

What makes a person unique?

Is it okay to assume someone's gender?

Process: Using a flip chart or smart board, get the group to brainstorm the first things that come to mind when they think of masculine vs. feminine. Ask them to discuss the difference between how men vs women are treated in society, how this impacts trans/gender queer folks in violent ways. Split the group into smaller groups and have them create a chart with Masculine/male/man on one side and Feminine/female/woman on the other side.

Have the smaller groups brainstorm stereotypes, adjectives, name-calling ideas for each side of the chart (swearing is okay)

Sample Small group questions:

What do you think of when someone says man/masculine/male? Female/feminine/woman?

What are things you notice about this chart?

Is there more on one side than the other?

What is being equated with negativity?

Why is femininity seen in a more negative light?

Are there any positive terms you put down under each side?

(While still in smaller groups): "breaking down gender"

What is masculinity?

What is Femininity?

Can someone be both masculine and feminine?

What are gender roles?

Over time how have gender roles changed?

What are some stereotypical gender themes that we see in our society?

What is gender equity?

(Switch into partners now) talk about trans/gender non-conforming identities

What is the difference between your gender identity and your gender expression?

What does it mean to be genderqueer (gender non-conforming, agender, bigender)?

What are gender-neutral pronouns? When should they be used?

Closing the session: After the small group and partnered discussions, ask them to share one thing that they will continue to reflect on and commit to doing so differently after this conversation. How can we make more room for gender-nonconformity? How can we show up in tangible, practical, daily ways for trans people? What will we do to fight trans erasure, transphobia, and daily instances of violence against trans peoples?

Writing a letter to yourself: Allot 10 minutes at the end of the session and encourage participants to reflect on what they have learnt throughout the workshop, what changes they might make, or steps they might take, in their lives or work because of it. Provide stationary and pens, along with prompts such as, "what do I know now that I did not know this morning?", "now that I know better, how will do better?". Ask them to address the letter to themselves, seal it, then give the letters back to the facilitator. In a follow-up session a few months down the line, get the participants to review these letters and reflect upon the successfulness of the intentions they set today.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Continuance

These workshops are loose templates that can be used by anybody who wishes to begin the lifelong work of reflecting on gender as a social, political, and historical mechanism of power. Educators need pedagogical approaches which concentrate more on efforts on inviting people to be with each other in our full humanity. We do not exist in isolation, and it is essential to our health that we are all healing together, healing each other, and healing our world. This portfolio surveyed the state of trans health care and how it shaped the education and policies which continue to directly impact the lives of trans, Two Spirit, and gender diverse students. I believe that trauma-informed spaces must be anti-oppressive in scope, design, and methodology. The biological and behavioural effects of trauma can be reversed by enriched social and physical environments (Cozolino, 2013, p. 49). By focusing on the creative learning strategies which trans learners deploy in order to survive violent environments, such as peer-supported learning, educators are able to nurture more trauma-informed learning environments to support trans learners. Van Der Kolk's book (2017) discusses a school program that he and his team have developed for schools to help children recognize their emotions, and how this helps with better learning from a trauma-informed lens (pp. 353-358). The Positive Psychology Program has free, open-access lesson plans on cultivating emotional intelligence in students (Moore, 2019); and much like the BC trauma-sensitive toolkit, there is an organization in the United States that also looks at building curriculum for trauma sensitive schools (2019). Dr. Dan Siegel has worked with a lot with students and trauma, and he has developed numerous methodologies to explain the brain to students to help with emotional awareness (2013). Learning about the impacts of trauma can help keep educators from misunderstanding the reasons underlying some children's difficulties with learning, behaviour and relationships.

Cultivating new strategies for fostering safe learning environments while simultaneously challenging the oppressive institutional mechanisms which create them is crucial for teachers who wish to support trans students. Trans students have been persisting and resisting across generations of oppression, and it is through the myth of separation of bodies, minds, and selves that this struggle is maintained. Teachers must reflect on the scripts that they have internalized about gender, bodies, and the world. In addition to the necessary work of rethinking gendered school structures, teachers must include culturally-relevant materials, play, self-reflection exercises, and experiential inquiry. It is for these reasons that I suggest using workshops and interactive, arts-based content which encourages self-reflection, peer-learning, and new perspectives on working from a place of lived experience in order to benefit the collective well-being.

Two Spirit Youth to the Front

Embodied resistance to gendered colonial violence has taken many new forms, such as cultural revitalization, art-based praxes, defining new digital territories, theoretical expansion, storytelling and literary works, new community resources, as well as the creation of collaborative educational models. The Native Youth Sexual Health Network's use of the term "resistance is sexy" is an example of queer Indigenous resistance to the tokenization, objectification, and fetishization of Indigenous sexualities by the colonial gaze (NYSHN, n.d.). Community-based workshops such as the works by Jackson and Shanks (2017) employ story circles as a means of Indigenous learning through self-reflection. Two Spirit poetry anthologies such as *Full Metal Indigiqueer* (Whitehead, 2017) re-imagine decolonization as an intentional "virus to canonical and popular works in order to re-center Two-Spirit livelihoods" (par. 1). The Indigenous Women and Two-Spirit Harm Reduction Coalition in Montreal exists as "a non-hierarchical, Indigenous collective organizing under an Indigenous feminist framework… to provide free harm reduction resources, referrals, and services to Indigenous women and Two-Spirit peoples" (Nixon and Swain, par. 1). Others are decolonizing the airwaves by producing radio shows and free, accessible podcasts such as Métis In Space, an Indigenous feminist deconstruction of the science fiction genre in television and film. All of these projects amplify the voices of gender diverse Indigenous peoples whose community leadership continues a legacy of Indigenous nationhood and sovereignty. These learning tools provide powerful critiques for educators who wish to decolonize notions of gender in the classroom and beyond.

One of the most predominant themes within Western LGBTQ+ discourse is the notion of "coming out of the closet" as the moment whereby a LGBTQ+ individual decides to announce their sexual orientation, gender identity, or some other aspect of their innermost selves to their families, co-workers, friends, and others. This moment is supposed to be a milestone in every LGBTQ+ person's life, signifying their newly emancipated status as an "out" person in the world. This theme can be viewed throughout mainstream Western literature, popular culture, television, and beyond. So prevalent is this notion that entire non-profit organizations and social justice campaigns have been initiated to support and encourage people who have or are planning to come out. But what does this cultural rite of passage say about the people who do not or cannot come out? What are the underlying epistemologies of the closet as deceptive space? Where did the closet begin? Binaohan (2014) says that "there is very little room in this narrative for people who are simply not operating within this moral space. For people who have greater considerations than personal feelings of dis/honesty… this has the consequence of erasing the experience of many" (p. 45). It is important to acknowledge the privilege operating within assumptions of how one will be received upon coming out. These narratives assume that

LGBTQ+ individuals will be supported if they come out, and if they aren't, that they are better off alone. But how does this apply to Two Spirit peoples, for example, who exist within collectivist worldviews and for whom a strong connection to community and land signifies strength and health?

The morality of the "closet" sets up yet another binary. The public/private dichotomy of those who come out honestly versus those who stay in, hiding dishonestly, is quite profound. A critique of settler and white-dominated LGBTQ+ discourse would challenge Western notions of coming out, as they often view family as a negotiable contract or afterthought to the individual's personal quest for visibility. This worldview directly correlates to a capitalist, white-centric hyper-individualism which contradicts Indigenous ways of knowing and doing. This narrative "requires a certain level of economic, social, and racial privilege to claim that disposing of one's family is a sign of moral integrity" (Binaohan, 2014, p. 45). The logic of colonization is such that is produces narratives such as these wherein gender and sexuality are universal, homogenous, categorizable experiences, when the reality is that a multiplicity of gender and sexual diversity exists across many cultural traditions, and that human nature and relationships cannot and should not be dictated according to colonial worldviews.

So, how can Western queer discourse challenge its assumptions about the inevitability of the colonial nation-state? Two Spirit resurgence challenges the white LGBTQ+ mainstream to turn the gaze back upon itself and reflect upon the ways in which its political advocacy has narrowly focused on privileged identity politics (Morgensen, 2011, 2012). Andrea Smith (2010) says that "the logics of settler colonialism and decolonization must be queered in order properly to speak to the genocidal present that not only continues to disappear indigenous peoples but reinforces the structures of white supremacy, settler colonialism, and heteropatriarchy that affect all peoples" (p. 64). Educators and community-based activists alike who wish to organize for 2S and LGBTQ+ rights in ways that prioritize Indigenous sovereignty and decolonization must commit to resisting the state and its mechanism. Queer and trans Black, Indigenous, Two Spirit and people of colour continue to question the role of police presence in Pride festivities, for example, for precisely these reasons (Tait, 2017). As a means of calling white organizers into accountable conversations about settler colonial heritage, Morgensen (2012) proposes that

> the problem is not that white, class-privileged, national inheritors of settler colonialism have been central to queer accounts. The problem is that all conclusions drawn from such accounts fail to explain not only all who are excluded from them but also all who are included: because the only possible explanation of queerness under white-supremacist settler colonialism is one that also interrogates that condition. Queer studies must examine settler colonialism as a condition of its own work (pp. 25-26).

Cultivating new strategies for fostering safe learning environments while simultaneously challenging the oppressive institutional mechanisms which create them is crucial for teachers who wish to support Two Spirit and trans students. Trans students have been persisting and resisting across generations of oppression, and it is through the myth of separation of bodies, minds, and selves that this struggle is maintained. Teachers must reflect on the scripts that they have internalized about gender, bodies, and the world.

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