A CULTURAL CROSSROADS: THE TEAR IN THE FABRIC BETWEEN RESEARCH AND LIBERATORY MOVEMENTS - AND WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT

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Abstract:

Traditional research practices and data generation conventions are critically important to the ways in which we formulate policy, opinion, and the law. These research practices, however, have long been steeped in systems of oppression and racialized sociopolitical ideology, and must shift with the needs of the most marginalized communities both historically, and in our time. This thesis focuses on the need for the incorporation of intersectional approaches and critical theoretical background in academic best practices across disciplines. To avoid further contributing to the disenfranchisement of underrepresented groups, scholars seeking to generate research for the benefit of marginalized communities must incorporate the lived experiences of these communities in their research. By rooting the ways we conceive of and conduct research projects in critical race theory, critical queer theory, and abolitionist feminist politics, we can address research's complicity in upholding systems of oppression through lenses of whiteness, heteronormativity, and cisnormativity. Through a survey of queer and trans youth and a set of oral histories of queer and trans adults, this thesis generates thought, analysis, and data on the necessity for making these holistic shifts in research practices on a broad scale.

A Cultural Crossroads: The Tear in the Fabric Between Research and Liberatory Movements - And What We Can Do About It

Introduction

Before I begin, I'd like to guide you through a short grounding exercise for this text. For the next few moments, consider the following: where are you as you settle in to read with me? Maybe you're still at home, working from home or enjoying your day off. If you commuted today, how did you arrive? Who did you pass by on your way? Did you arrive via car, or did you walk or ride your bike? Now think of who you might have seen on your way. Did they look like you, for the most part? Talk like you? Move through the world like you? And, more importantly, had you considered any of this before I asked you to?

The goal of this exercise was to prompt you, the reader, with questions related to class, accessibility, race, and even your own, personal awareness of the world - and people - around you. Far too often in academic spaces, personal investment in a topic has been sacrificed - or, perhaps, frowned upon - but with human-oriented topics, like social sciences or politics, personal investment can make all the difference in the world for how we relate to, understand, and even enact what we learn.

With this in mind, I hope to orient your thoughts on your *positionality* - that is, how differences in social position and power shape identities and access in society.[1] The concept of positionality is crucial to understanding basic ideas of feminism, politics, and identity; a working

[1] Collins, 2001

knowledge of positionality enables us to integrate multiple disciplines at once, seeing more of the world around us (and the people in it) than we might otherwise.

Part I

Critical Context

We are on the precipice of the next significant sociocultural moment in the political West. As I write this, we find ourselves situated at a pivotal juncture of the social, the political, the legal, and the theoretical that will determine how all of us - scholars, policymakers, and the public alike - will approach the world around them for decades to come. This tear in our cultural fabric has been building upon itself for several decades, catalyzed by movements, politicians, and legal shifts amplified by social and political agendas of the right and left alike. Through engaging in partisan-focused political battles, the Western right and left continue to contribute to increasingly polarized political atmospheres, simultaneously centering rights-based battles and conflating them with the deterioration of morality and normalcy. For many, this increased political pressure feels like a breaking point is approaching - and an accompanying sense of urgency is propelling this current sociopolitical situation forward at unprecedented rates. Of course, American politics is significantly more complex than this - allowing for crucial information and frameworks to be lost in the background and for this conflict to continue.

This analysis is situated at the intersection of anti-institution and anti-racist critical theory. Where anti-institution theory serves as a factual basis to acknowledge concrete ways in which systems of power, such as white supremacy, operate,[2] anti-racist critical theory operates

[2] In other words: to be anti-racist is to be anti-institution.
Cristopher Mayes, 2021

on a foundation that not only acknowledges the existence of racism in all facets of Western life, but further argues that a race-blind approach fails to satisfy such anti-racist efforts.[3] As a white[4] scholar, I will utilize existing anti-racist, anti-institution frameworks to establish my theoretical arguments within these bounds. Within this vein, there are several premises I find necessary to begin this analysis:

- The law is racialized and designed for disenfranchisement, not rehabilitation.[5]
- Mainstream Queer Politics is a liberal engine and contributes to the racialization and marginalization of Black and Brown people, particularly in the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC).[6]
- Anti-racist thought is inherently abolitionist in nature.[7]
- Critical Theory is necessary to challenge Eurocentric legal practices and the reproduction of sociopolitical harm in the United States.

In addition to these premises, I will orient my article based on the theoretical definitions below:

- *Critical Theory*: Seeks to uncover the formative socio-economic processes of exploitation, struggle, and domination that underpin both the objective appearance of reality and our subjective ability to become conscious of them.[8] In other words, critical theory is, well, critical of social and political structures such as racism, sexism, classism,

[3] Scarlato, 2018
[4] The term *white* will remain uncapitalized due to racialized context, as outlined by the Associated Press in 2020.
[5] Zinzi D. Bailey, Sc.D., M.S.P.H., Justin M. Feldman, Sc.D., and Mary T. Bassett, M.D., M.P.H., 2021
[6] Eric A. Stanley, 2016
[7] Angela Y. Davis and Dylan Rodriguez, 2000
[8] Horkheimer, 2002

homophobia, transphobia, and ableism in the ways that they are justified and perpetrated in the interest of societal success.

- *Feminist Political Theory*: Focuses on understanding and critiquing the way political philosophy is often constructed - which is often without any attention to feminist issues and seeks to identify and articulate how political theory might be reconstructed in a way that advances feminist concerns.[9] For the purposes of this article, Feminist Political Theory will also include abolitionist feminism, which seeks to identify ways in which prisons and policing fail to provide justice to women and other marginalized groups.[10]

- *Critical Race Theory*: Critically confronts the role in the law and legal processes in upholding and reproducing white supremacy. Critical Race Theory includes analysis of the ways in which white supremacy as an institution pervades other minority classes, such as race, class, and sexual orientation - and addresses the complicity and Eurocentrality of the American legal system.[11]

- *Queer Legal Theory*: Seeks to include not only Queer liberation at the heart of its focus, but Black liberation, Disability Justice, and any other marginal movement towards justice for populations that are erased and/or oppressed by the State[12]. Queer Legal Theory is inherently anti-racist and abolitionist[13] as it advocates for Black liberation from the same forces that oppress queer people at a societal, structural level.[14]

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[9] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2009
[10] Rebel Archives
[11] Crenshaw, Gotanda and Peller, 1995
[12] Adler, 2018
[13] (Angela Y. Davis, Toni Morrison, Cornel West, et. al., 1997
[14] Crenshaw, Gotanda and Peller, 1995

Further, a well-developed exploration of the efficacy of Queer Legal Theory as an aggregate of political observation, feminist scholarship, and critical theory to offer alternative approaches to contemporary sociopolitical conflict and substantive explanation for patterns of engagement within marginalized communities must operate along not only a queer-focused axis, but an anti-racist axis and an anti-colonial axis as well. In other words, marginalized communities don't experience just one identity struggle at a time - and substantive research and advocacy must widely incorporate this multidimensional reality as a best practice. Operating within an understanding of intersectional feminist thought, it is impossible to discuss queer politics without also including politics that affect Black and Brown bodies[15]; therefore, Queer Legal Theory cannot be fully discussed or properly analyzed without the inclusion of Black and Brown history, politics, and thought. I will summarize the evolution and subsequent polarization of American politics as we know them - with the intention of demystifying ways in which Western structures of power affect us all, regardless of if we are aware of it or not.

To begin, we must understand how we have arrived here. In many ways, contemporary social and legal polarization began long before the public acknowledged it; long before major news networks began publishing bylines like *Election Denialism Spurs More Political Violence*[16] or *U.S. Supreme Court Enabled Racial Gerrymandering in the South*[17], the U.S.'s hard turn towards hard-right politics was being conceived behind closed doors across the nation.

[15] Nicolazzo, 2016
[16] Election Denialism Again Spurs Political Violence, This Time in N.M.
[17] U.S. Supreme Court Enabled Racial Gerrymandering in South Carolina

The 1950's and 1960's: The Heart of Civil Rights

In considering critical movements towards racial equality, the American collective consciousness was drawn towards idolized figures and idealized legislation and away from a much more insidious progress happening in conservative spaces across the nation. Martin Luther King, Jr. was at the height of his civil rights advocacy, the continuing damage from the Jim Crow South was coming to light, and the lived experience of Black people in America was becoming a nationwide, public conversation at long last. [18]

At the same time, political education was being used as a tool for revolutionary engagement. The Black Panthers[19], a Black power political movement founded in 1966 with a capacity to transcend racial and class boundaries, utilized political education to organize for and around Black consciousness, challenging the status quo established by those in political power who relied on white supremacy to underwrite their social, financial, and political success at the expense of Black people in the United States. In their opposition of the racialized, classist lived experience of most Black Americans, the Black Panthers and other activist groups like them challenged structures of power that upheld class division and racist policies, drawing the attention of powerful figures in American politics - and putting a metaphorical target on their own backs. [20], the U.S. government firmly positioned itself against ideals of Black liberation, equity, and community - and primed the U.S. to continue along its path towards newly minted conservatism and anti-Black, anti-Indigenous policies.

Concurrently, the police raid on Stonewall Inn in New York[21] sparked an uprising, both in the physical and in the consciousness of LGBTQ+ people in the U.S.; highlighting increased

[18] The Little Rock Nine
[19] Donna Jean Murch, 2010
[20] The Real Black Panthers (2021)
[21] The Stonewall Uprising: 50 Years of LGBT History

policing, intimidation, and brutality that marginalized communities in the U.S. regularly faced. By institutionalizing physical violence against Black, Brown, and LGBTQ+ people through state-sanctioned policing[22] and socioemotional violence through ostracization and disregard for the wellbeing[23] of these communities, the most vulnerable communities were placed at opposition with the federal[24] government and legislative power.

The 1970's and 1980's: America's Right Turn and The Normalization of Racist Dog-Whistles

In 1971, President Nixon declared a "War on Drugs".[25] During the next ten years, the federal government would develop, release, and enforce a series of policies designed to power the War on Drugs - dramatically increasing sentencing and low-level criminal offense laws, and expanding police funding and protections nationwide, consequently racializing Black and Brown populations and capitalizing on poverty. With foundations rooted in racism, the War on Drugs' justifications for violence and disenfranchisement of Black and Brown communities beginning exactly where the federal government's persecution of the Black Panther party left off.[26] At the same time, the federal government largely ignored the rapidly expanding HIV/AIDS epidemic, choosing to isolate and stigmatize LGBTQ+ communities over recognizing the health crisis and addressing it with federal resources. In both cases, the federal government utilized its resources, social capital, and political power to exploit very real issues facing Americans - like poverty, unsafe drug use, and HIV/AIDS - to influence sociopolitical attitudes regarding marginalized

[22] How Racial Segregation and Policing Intersect in America
[23] Bettina M. Beech, Chandra Ford, Roland J. Thorpe, Jr., Marino A. Bruce, and Keith C. Norris, 2021
Jennifer A. Pellowski, Seth C. Kalichman, Karen A. Matthews, and Nancy Adler, 2014
Maxine Baca Zinn,1989
[24] For the purposes of this article, the term federal will refer to the United States government.
[25] Race and the Drug War
[26] Micah E. Johnson, 2021

communities in the United States.[27] Through racializing Black and Brown populations and dehumanizing LGBTQ+ communities, a conservative legal movement was emerging, making itself indispensable in the illusory battle for the safety and security of the American consciousness.

Following a decade of racist drug-related incarceration policies, President Reagan was elected in 1981. Running on a platform of thinly veiled racism and states' rights, President Reagan relied heavily on disenfranchising minority social groups to appeal to his target body of voters: white, Republican people from the south. Early in his presidency, the first several cases of HIV/AIDS were reported in Los Angeles; however, the Reagan Administration opted for an approach that prioritized obfuscation of the severity of HIV/AIDS, heavily contributing to stigmatizing the epidemic[28] and delaying care for those with HIV/AIDS in the United States by years, if not decades.[29] President Reagan utilized the office of president to further the conservative legal agenda in many ways[30]. This advancement occurred through obvious, public avenues, such as appointing dozens of federal judges with right-aligned political histories[31], supporting militarized foreign wars[32], and codifying conservative legislation, and through quieter, more insidious moves, such as continuing President Nixon's War on Drugs, normalizing the use of racist dog-whistles, and galvanizing right-leaning around racialized politics[33]. Conservative strategies and sentiments were losing traction to more progressive ideals in social spheres following the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and increasing efforts for desegregation; however, through consistently blaming the woes of 1980's Americans on Black, Brown, and

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[27] hiv.gov
[28] The Reagan Administration's Unbelievable Response to the HIV/AIDS Epidemic
[29] A Disturbing New Glimpse at the Reagan Administration's Indifference to AIDS
[30] Perlstein
[31] Rosenberg G. N.
[32] Remembering the Dead: Reagan Armed Iraq and Iran in 1980s War That Killed Over 1 Million
[33] How Ronald Reagan's Racism Helped Pave the Way for Donald Trump's

LGBTQ+ people, President Reagan further cemented the role of these strategies and sentiments in American politics moving forward.

The 1990's and early 2000's: The Modernization of Politics

Following a decade of continuing advancement in the construction of conservative moral and political ideals at the federal level during the 1990's, the terror attacks on September 11th, 2001 signaled another shift in the American political consciousness.[34] Where previous global military exploits and conflicts had a mixed approval rating and inconsistent degree of continued support, a vast majority of Americans supported legislation, such as the Patriot Act, that followed the events of 9/11.[35] This overwhelming approval, combined with fear of future attacks, allowed the federal government to justify a renewed military campaign into the global south with very few voices in opposition. These military ventures, while focused on national safety at first, became a generalizable justification for American intervention and involvement abroad, fueled by residual, enshrined racist and colonial political ideology from the twentieth century. As the effects of the post-9/11 American unity wore off, a shift towards increasing focus on human rights began to emerge, its social and political difference from the military-oriented American consciousness creating frequent friction between a rapidly diverging American left and right.[36]

The 2010's: Human Rights and the Downfall of the Moderate

As the (inter)national discourse around human rights continued to emerge, a political polarization, of which there had been fairly little before the 1990's, began to intensify. In fact, between 1994 and 2017, American political attitudes, values, and opinions shifted dramatically,

[34] How 9/11 Radically Expanded the Power of the U.S. Government
[35] "United" We Stand: Responses to the September 11 Attacks in Black and White
[36] United in Remembrance, Divided over Policies

moving from moderate-centered politics with shared values to polarized politics with few shared values and significantly more political engagement.[37] While certain issues, such as marriage equality[38] and voter identification[39], had increasing bipartisan support over the 2000's, while support for other issues, such as border security and transgender rights[40], varied dramatically, often on partisan lines.[41] Following the 2016 presidential election, during which misinformation in presidential campaigns was at an all-time high and partisan-focused politics were prioritized over candidate bids across the aisle to win bipartisan votes, political polarization increased skyrocketed - at the expense of moderate America, in many ways - creating a more hostile and ideologically cohesive political atmosphere.[42]

During this period of political turmoil, conservative and liberal legal strategies shifted to include human rights in their platforms - but in deeply different ways[43]. Where liberals moved to support LGB rights, conservatives announced a "moral deterioration of America"[44], scapegoating increasingly hostile social and political conditions on LGBTQ+ Americans while simultaneously moving to (re)criminalize LGBTQ+ populations through removal of and opposition to anti-discrimination protections and marriage equality. By reincorporating LGBTQ+ Americans in assertions of "moral deterioration" and "the erosion of traditional, American values", the conservative legal machine absorbed another minority group in their contemporary constructions of moral/immoral, legal/criminalized, and acceptable/unthinkable.

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[37] The Shift in the American Public's Political Values
[38] Support for Same-Sex Marriage at Record High, but Key Segments Remain Opposed
[39] Broad Support for Photo ID Voting Requirements
[40] Howell, 2015
[41] Americans' Complex Views on Gender Identity and Transgender Issues
[42] The Polarization in Today's Congress Has Roots That Go Back Decades
[43] Creamer, 2007
[44] The Moral Decline of America

The 2020's: Political Polarization and All-Out Chaos

Following several years of the COVID-19 pandemic, heightened tensions in local, state, and federal politics, and increased hostility in daily interactions between many U.S. citizens, the early 2020's have been wrought with political chaos and ideological wars. Increased social media utilization has enabled social and political discourse to happen at a rate that is difficult for individuals to maintain, catalyzing burnout and increasingly avoidant (or intense) behaviors around political engagement. An average social media user in the U.S. might see content regarding a mass shooting, a political controversy, a racist confrontation, and an environmental disaster in the course of an hour; paired with mounting pressure to prioritize self-care and personal health, many find themselves exhausted, confused, and hesitant to take a stand on issues that affect them, let alone those that don't directly involve their identities.

At the same time, lawmakers and interest groups alike have utilized the conservative legal framework that has been decades in the making to launch widespread attacks on minority populations in the U.S., ranging from LGBTQ+ rights to abortion access and racialized redistricting of voter districts in majority-black communities. With a Supreme Court that is more conservative than it has been in fifty years, with a 6-3 majority, conservative lawmakers at all levels of government feel socially and politically comfortable to pursue increasingly inhibitory policy tracks in a shared effort fueled by an effective, yet dangerous, amalgamation of conservative politicians, ideologues, and interest groups.

So… Now What? A Drop in the Ocean of "Woke" Politics

In this current political moment, there is a very real danger in the consequences that might follow this battle for American consciousness[45]. As can be observed from the repetitive influence of sociopolitical rhetoric on social consciousness and political engagement[46], the reality facing this era of activists and politicians alike includes a set of stakes higher than historical conflicts in many ways. And, in the spirit of American individualism, this round of sociopolitical conflict requires just as much of a critical look at the ways in which we orient ourselves in community as the ways we reflect on our values and our needs as individuals - in many ways, this moment cannot be traversed without the presence of both.

More than ever before, research focused on marginalized populations is finding its way to major news outlets, high-profile court cases, political and legal best practices, and presidential executive orders. The ACLU has filed hundreds of lawsuits against racist, transphobic policies in the past five years[47]; President Biden has released an executive order prohibiting any federal discrimination against LGBTQ+ Americans[48]; and the American Medical Association has released a letter in support of gender-affirming medical practices.[49] Findings and data generated by research focused on LGBTQ+ and communities of color have significantly impacted these policies, as well as the sociopolitical shift in the American consciousness that has followed.

While there has been significant progress in the quantity and quality of research conducted on marginalized populations in the past several decades, there is still a dramatic gap between the studies that are completed, the data that is actually utilized, and the practice of

[45] Daniel L. Byman, 2021
[46] Daren G. Fisher, Laura Dugan, Erica Chenoweth, 2019
[47] ACLU, 2020 Annual Report
[48] Executive Order on Advancing Equality for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Individuals
[49] AMA to States: Stop Interfering in Health Care of Transgender Children

applying data to promote social and political policies that will further contribute to the oppression and criminalization of disadvantaged groups. For instance, Black and Brown communities are not benefited by research about violence in majority Black or Brown neighborhoods if this data is used to advocate for increased policing rather than an increase in financial investment and resource allocation to communities of color that are facing difficulties. With this contradiction between improved research practices and realistic impact of such research, it is absolutely necessary - critical, even - to incorporate feminist, critical theory into the research that we do and the discourse that we have. No amount of data collected on marginalized populations can combat the deeply ingrained biases, structures of power, and forces of white supremacy and capitalist competition that creates the conditions of marginalization for these populations in the first place. Instead, researchers, academics, and policymakers, and those in positions with social and political capital must commit themselves, their research, and their advocacy to this standard.

Interdisciplinary Significance

Modern feminist-political[50] theory identifies an intersectional, interdisciplinary approach as critical to completely understanding the effects of transphobia in combination with the simultaneous oppression of other identities on transgender communities.[51] In other words, we cannot comprehend the lived experience of marginalized people without identifying the multiple iterations of oppression that these individuals and communities face. In this way, intersectionality and interdisciplinarity go hand in hand; just as an individual may experience anti-blackness, homophobia, and misogyny at the same time, evaluating hardships faced by a

[50] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2009
[51] Lutz, 2015 & Ahmed, 2021

community through multiple lenses (take access to adequate medical care and education or environmental racism, for example) is critical to seeing the full picture.

The case for incorporating intersectionality and interdisciplinarity into sociopolitical discourse and research can be seen clearly in the issue of transgender rights in the late 2010s and early 2020s. As transgender[52] rights have become a wedge issue in electoral work, anti-transgender rhetoric designed to divide and alienate potential support for transgender communities has become commonplace.[53] Elected officials frequently utilize isolating, dismissive, or simply contradictory language to describe transgender people in public forums and federal spaces.[54] This rhetorical pattern, however, is not limited to anti-transgender positionality. In fact, *marginalizing rhetoric*[55] – language used to isolate, undermine, or encourage violence – operates very similarly between disadvantaged groups and normalizes undermining rhetoric and the violence this rhetoric encourages. Historically disenfranchised groups, such as women, people of color, and those with low socioeconomic status, have been, and continue to be, subject to marginalizing rhetoric that is recycled by oppressive forces, while simultaneously being disguised in an effort to divide marginalized groups and effectively prevent community-based collaboration.[56]

Feminist and political theorists have identified marginalizing rhetoric as problematic and a factor in violence against vulnerable populations.[57] To adequately understand the effects of marginalizing rhetoric on communities, researchers have conducted in-depth interviews with

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[52]This subsection is in part drawn from the following:
Rosanova, M. (2022). A New Lens: Trans-Focused Praxis For Better Analysis [Unpublished research project-analysis].
[53] Castle, 2018
[54] Castle, 2018
[55] This is not a coined term, but is defined by several academics, including R.C. Scher in 2005, in his article *The Marginalizing Rhetoric of Nationalism.*
[56] Butler, 2021
[57] Ahmed, 2021

transgender populations globally to generate concrete evidence related to the consequences of anti-transgender rhetoric on these populations.[58] These research studies have consequently generated analytical scales through which a measurable understanding of the effects of marginalizing rhetoric on transgender communities can be identified, allowing feminist and political theorists to incorporate these qualitative findings in their analyses and advocacy.

These findings, while critical to combating anti-transgender violence[59] in all of its forms, are limited to a single axis of analysis and understanding – and are therefore severely limited in their ability to be transformative for all vulnerable populations that marginalizing rhetoric negatively affects.[60] In other words, research that focuses its discourse, analysis, and conclusions on a single identity or social issue is limited in its applicability to real-world situations, which result from many sociopolitical factors at once. Research conducted in the past five years has begun to explore the invaluable benefits of incorporating multi-axis analysis into research focused on marginalized populations – and this potential impact on research communities and theoretical communities alike must not be ignored.

Increased anti-transgender violence, in combination with a limited sociopolitical understanding or advocacy for protections for transgender communities, has delivered transgender communities to a deeply precarious position[61] – and must be analyzed along multiple axes of oppression simultaneously.[62] By including antiracist, anti-elitist, queer, feminist lenses in research and analysis of sociopolitical factors in the oppression of transgender communities, the literature reviewed here allows interested parties to understand the current positionality of

[58] Peitzmeier et. al., 2020
[59] Peitzmeier et. al., 2021
[60] Da Costa, 2021
[61] Even in the United States, language in anti-transgender legislation varies significantly from limitation of rights to eradication from public life.
[62] MacDonald, 1998

transgender individuals and necessary areas of research development. Critical areas of development in multi-praxis analysis benefit marginalized populations in a transformative, efficient way. This study seeks to explore the impact of multi-praxis analysis on sociolegal arguments and marginalizing rhetoric, particularly in the context of trans-activism, with an ultimate goal of expanding contemporary understandings of the value of intersectional awareness and analysis in political and legal spheres.

As feminist and political theorists have moved away from pathological definitions of queer identity, the understanding that conservative definitions of transsexuality are limited in authenticity by their dependency on medicalized, essentialized understandings of gender and sex, particularly under normative assumptions of whiteness, class privilege, and access to education, has become widely accepted in academic discourse.[63] Following this shift in feminist, sociopolitical academic consciousness over time, research exploring factors for violence against transgender communities have begun to expand significantly, with awareness of previous research gaps becoming more widespread[64]. Theoretical conversations are moving past transgender viability in legal and political spheres to include minority stress frameworks – structures to help researchers understand and analyze minority health disparities – to understand oppressive factors at the intersection of transgender identity and other marginalized identifiers.[65] By identifying and acknowledging the violence that transgender communities face, and utilizing this evidence to directly address anti-transgender violence, contemporary feminist and political theory seeks to understand transgender communities not just through a heteronormative Western lens, but through a queer political framework designed to dismantle oppression at its source

[63] Halberstam, 1998
[64] Joshua D. Safer, 2021
[65] Arayasirikul & Wilson, 2018; Nayak, 2021

rather than simply develop methods of survival within - and therefore must be included in related research.[66]

The increased frequency of studies focused on anti-transgender violence helps to clarify tangible legal, social, and political needs of transgender communities globally – and these findings are directly applicable to transgender and gender non-conforming communities in the U.S.. Most often, federal institutions do not support marginalized communities if there is little formal, widely accepted evidence of difficulty; in the case of transgender individuals, their existence and access to basic human rights in the global majority disputed, directly undermining institutional support.[67] Case studies seeking to identify and document violence against transgender communities have been critical to garnering institutional support and legal protections through identification of these individuals as a vulnerable population.[68] By categorizing transgender individuals as vulnerable, advocacy groups and feminist-political scholars alike are able to link anti-transgender violence and related rhetoric to other struggles with oppression, such as racism, sexism, and class struggles.[69]

Through evidentiary discourse, the positive impact on transgender-focused research and theorizing is tangible, and according to feminist-political thinkers, is critical to not only the support of and advocacy for transgender communities, but for the liberation of these communities from institutional oppressive forces as well.[70] However, as feminist and political discourse become increasingly polarized, analyses along multiple intersections fall prey to exclusionary parties, such as trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs)[71], working backwards

[66] Lenning, Brightman, & Buist, 2021
[67] Hines, 2019
[68] Rodríguez-Madera et. al., 2017
[69] Sutton & Borland, 2018; Bochicchio et. al., 2018
[70] MacDonald, 1998
[71] Pearce, 2020

against newly established critical analyses praxis.[72] Arguments utilized by TERFs and other anti-transgender ideologues often rely upon biological determinism and tenets of essentialism, insisting that transgender communities violate a variety of natural agreements.[73] Their analyses are limited by these essentialized foundations, however, dampening the accuracy and resonance in their arguments for broad populations. In the case of TERFs, their discourse is exclusionary, normative, and limited in nature, with some TERFs going as far as to argue that advocacy for groups outside of white, cisgender, and heterosexual undermine the category of woman[74] - blatantly disregarding a broader spectrum of feminine-identified or experienced individual. Given the precarious position of marginalized groups in Western politics at the current moment, essentialized politics do not belong in sociopolitical analysis of marginalized communities.

It is crucial, now more than ever, to reject essentialist, exclusionary arguments and analysis in favor of seeking understanding of oppressive forces along multiple axes. Future research must orient its inquiry on multi-praxis analysis; the inclusion of multiple sociopolitical factors in analysis, while more complex, is necessary to adequately understand the violence that marginalized communities face.

By seeking to understand how transphobia and misogyny amalgamate to oppress and encourage violence towards transgender communities, my research will prioritize intersectional, multi-praxis analysis and incorporate established understandings of oppressive power structures in Western politics to understand contemporary anti-transgender violence and marginalization. With an awareness of the necessity for intersectional research practices and analysis, contemporary research must reject the norm that analysis can occur only on a single praxis.

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[72] Erikainen & Vincent, 2020
[73] Da Costa, 2021
[74] Ashlee Christoffersen, Akwugo Emejulu, 2022

Research that seeks to understand marginalizing rhetoric must continue to develop despite increasingly volatile sociopolitical attitudes, especially through a[75] queer political lens that encompasses nonconformity and narrative in a holistic, accessible way.

Part II

To better understand the influence of intersectional analysis and Critical Theory application in research and formal data collection, I sought to examine these relationships through the lens of queer young people's social, political, and identity-based experiences. By collecting data not only on population demographics and identity labels, but an additive set of Queer Legal Theory and feminist theory-informed questions, this survey was able to generate preliminary data for a series of research questions related to the impact of political education, immutable identity characteristics, and critical theory immersion on civic engagement in LGBTQ+ youth populations. In other words, I infused principles of intersectionality and Critical Race Theory with widely accepted data collection practices - in this case, surveying and basic data analysis - to show the efficacy of studying marginalized identities with an informed approach.

Method

This survey was conducted via Qualtrics, a survey technology provided to students, faculty, and staff at the University of Arizona for academic and outward-facing research purposes.[76] This survey, consisting of 22 varied-structure questions, was administered between

[75] Respondents were prompted with questions that specifically focused on interactions between their queer identities and their experiences with politics.
[76] qualtrics.arizona.edu

October 26, 2022, and January 31, 2023. During this period, the survey received 102 valid responses.[77]

Within this survey sample, respondents who were included identified as any of the following:

- Queer – meaning any identity falling under the LGBTQ+ umbrella
- Transgender – typically defined as any person whose gender identity does not align with the sex assigned to them at birth.
- Gender Non-Conforming (GNC) – generally including anyone whose outward gender expression differs from or may not match their assigned pronoun associations.
- Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) – which includes anyone who is undergoing HRT for gender or medical transition-related purposes.

Because of the specific nature of this research focus, individuals who did not identify as either queer, transgender, gender non-conforming, or engaged in HRT – the core categories of interest to this research - were excluded from this target population. This focus on marginalized communities allowed this research to be focused on this specific sample for data collection and analysis purposes. Because of this limited sample, this survey data does not include findings for non-LGBTQ+ or non-GNC individuals; however, for the ways in which this data lacks this dimension, it provides substantial evidence for research question(s) regarding trans and GNC youth populations and related sociopolitical issues.

[77] A valid response: the ReCAPTCHA was validated by Qualtrics' technology.

Procedure

Previous to survey administration, the Primary Investigator sought Institutional Review Board approval from their home institution, the University of Arizona. Following this approval process for generalizable human populations research, the survey was advertised via an institutionally approved flier and was distributed among social media and online group collaborative spaces, including GroupMe and Instagram posts, stories, and direct messages. In each space, the flier (see below) was accompanied by a clickable link that directed a potential participant to the survey's participation disclosure information.

Participation

Respondents' participation in this survey was voluntary; similarly, each survey question requested a response from participants but did not require a response. This meant that respondents could safely and comfortably participate in this survey while maintaining confidentiality and agency in providing or not providing information at their discretion. Participants were not asked to provide any identifiable information, including, but not limited to name, email address, and place of education or occupation. The purpose of this anonymous survey distribution was to encourage genuine responses and to generate data that could be used to represent a portion of the target population as closely as possible, while removing potential response biases.

Data Collection & Analysis

This survey was open and collected data from October 26, 2022, to January 31, 2023. Following this period, data was stored securely in Qualtrics, mentioned above, with no identifiable characteristics, as the data was categorized, analyzed, and crafted into digestible

graphics and observations. The following figures represent significant correlations between survey responses and graphical representations of demographic data in relation to response rate and data patterns.

Discussion

The figures below show the demographic distribution of survey respondents. While not all respondents who began the survey finished the survey, the demographic distribution below accurately represents the communities reached by the survey, both in actuality and as the target populations.

Due to this survey's focus on LGBTQ+ youth populations, the majority of the respondents were aged 18-25, with 88% of respondents falling within this age group. Similarly, a majority of respondents are currently enrolled in a community college, state college, or university in the state of Arizona. A majority of respondents are Arizona residents, with 85% of respondents identifying that they have lived in the state of Arizona for 12 or more months. To ensure that I could reach my target population in the time available for this research project, I focused the scope of my survey on LGBTQ+ young adults in Arizona, a reachable population with the time and resources allotted.

Question 1: What is your age?
Question 2: Are you an Arizona resident? (Have you lived in Arizona for 12+ months?)
Question 3: Are you currently enrolled in a community college, state college, or university in Arizona?

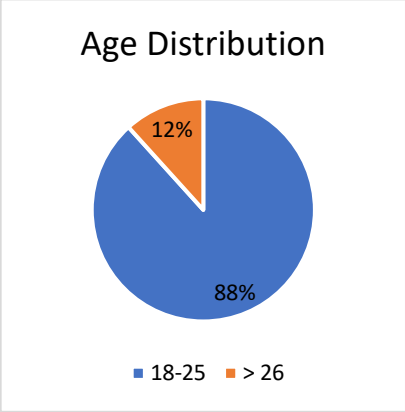


Figure 1

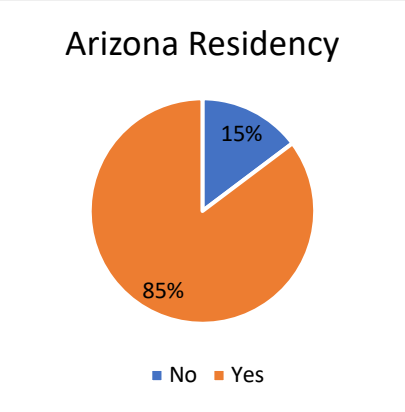


Figure 2

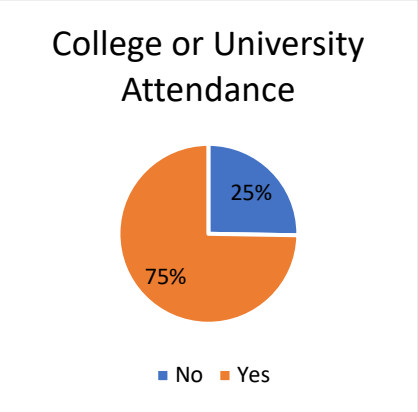


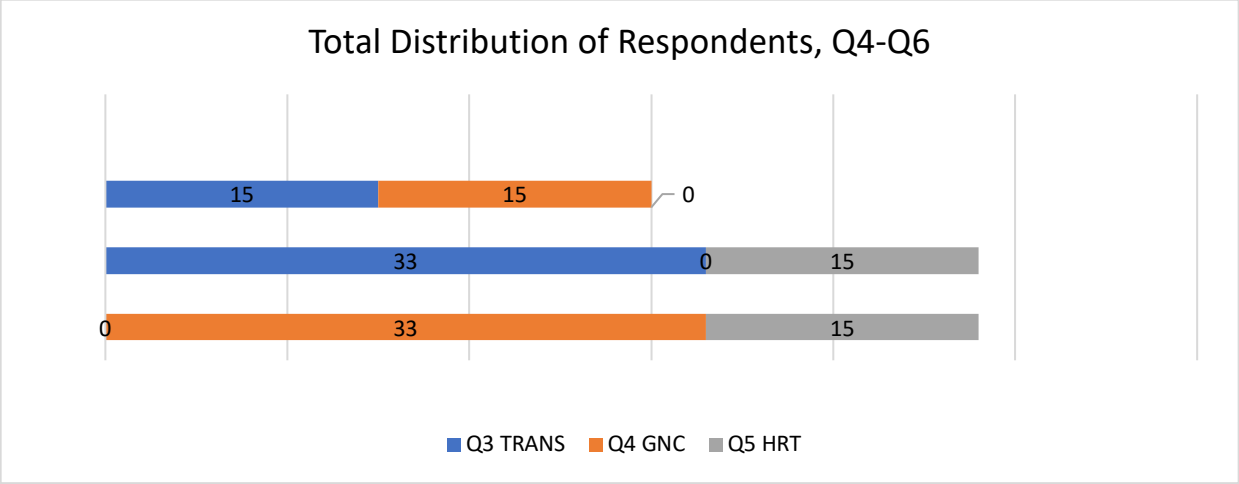
Figure 3

Among the total distribution of respondents who identified as transgender, GNC, and/or undergoing HRT, a majority of respondents identified as at least one of the above categories at 84%. The 16% of respondents who did not identify as any of these categories selected *no* for questions 3-5, but continued to finish the remainder of the survey. Of the 84% of respondents who identified as transgender, GNC, and/or undergoing HRT, Figure 4 shows distributions of each identity within the others. For example: of the 26 respondents who are undergoing HRT, 15 respondents also identified as transgender, and 15 respondents also identified as GNC. By breaking down the distribution of these core identity categories in this way, we are able to identify overlapping identity labels and patterns in social and personal identification. This breakdown of categories reinforces and can be corroborated by sociopolitical theory and related findings. For example, 33 of the 48 transgender-identified respondents also identify as GNC; because transgender individuals are more likely to be seen as non-normative and non-

conforming[78], this overlapping of identities can be understood both in the context of this data and in the context of broader sociopolitical contexts[79].

Question 4: Do you identify as Transgender?
Question 5: Do you identify as gender non-conforming?
Question 6: Have you or are you currently engaging in HRT (Hormone Replacement Therapy)?

Figure 4



Because this research is contingent upon principles of anti-racism and anti-colonialism, it is critical to examine the ways in which race and whiteness appear in the survey data and demographics. Of all respondents, 31% identify as Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) or as People of Color (POC); the remaining 69% indicated that they do not identify as BIPOC or POC. Among the core category respondents, the distribution of BIPOC/POC was slightly higher (see below) but overall very similar to the total distribution. Research seeking to gain insight into or advocate for LGBTQ+ populations must include race-competent research techniques,

[78] Meredith G. F. Worthen, 2016
[79] Chris A. Barcelos, 2019

including seeking a racially proportionate sample population; this particular survey achieved an approximately 1:2 BIPOC to White distribution, making it generally representational[80] of the population surveyed.

Question 7: Do you identify as a person of color?

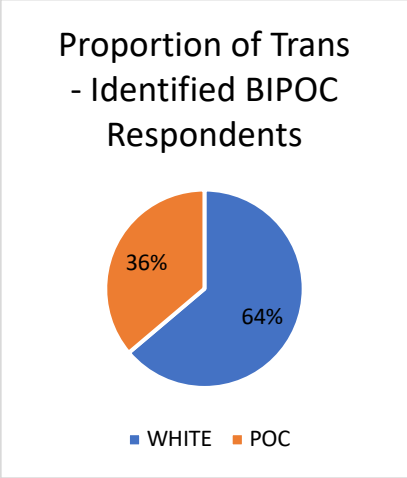


Figure 5

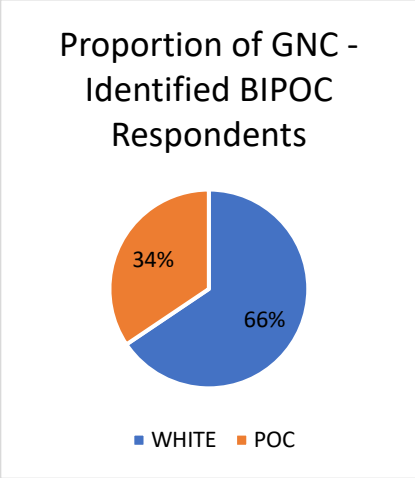


Figure 6

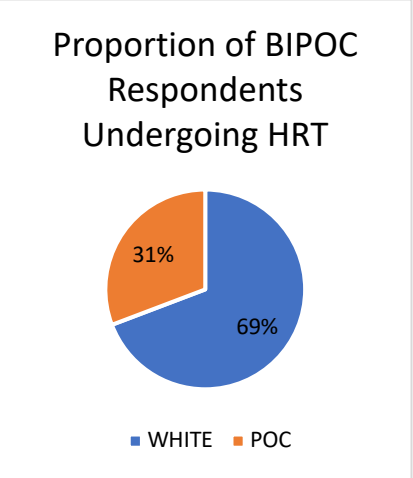


Figure 7

Following a series of demographic questions, the respondents were asked to answer questions related to gender identity, sexuality, public and private perception, and the political nature of these ideas. The survey itself was divided into four pages to be more visually and cognitively accessible to a wide variety of respondents; among the respondents who didn't complete the full survey, their progress stopped after a set of these questions. Following the first section, containing demographic questions, 88% of respondents completed the second set, containing identity-based questions, 85% completed the third set, containing questions regarding personal identity in public and private spheres, and 81% completed the full set of questions. It is likely that respondents who began the survey but did not finish were either interrupted or did not

[80] United States Census Bureau

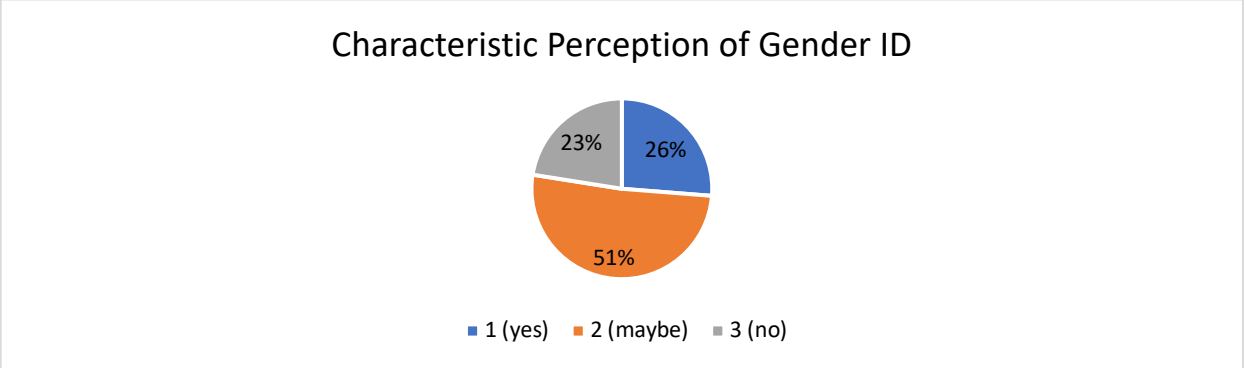
feel comfortable finishing the survey due to a variety of factors.[81] With a completion rate of 81%, however, it is still possible to draw beneficial data correlations and consider further questioning for future research from this survey.

With an interest in understanding through data the ways in which trans and GNC young adults conceptualize their own perceptions of gender identity and the ways that others perceive them, the second set of questions focused on external perception of gender identity and sexuality. When asked if their own gender identity is apparent to others based upon observable external characteristics alone[82], 26% of respondents said *yes*, while 51% said *maybe* and 23% said *no*. Many LGBTQ+ individuals are consistently aware that their outward gender expression or mannerisms influence the way they are able to navigate the world; this is even more frequent and at a higher threshold of safety and security for transgender and GNC individuals. For young adults, this can be more of a mixed bag, with young people on the whole being more likely to be tolerant of different identities[83], but adults more likely to exert influence or control over LGBTQ+ young adults' autonomy.[84]

[81] Amany Saleh and Krishna Bista, 2017
[82] The language of the question was very open ended; in hindsight, this was more vague than intended and might have affected the responses to this particular question.
[83] Jan G. Janmaat, Avril Keating, 2017
[84] W. Roger Mills-Koonce, Peter D. Rehder, and Amy L. McCurdy, 2023

Question 18 : Is your gender identity apparent to others based on characteristics alone?

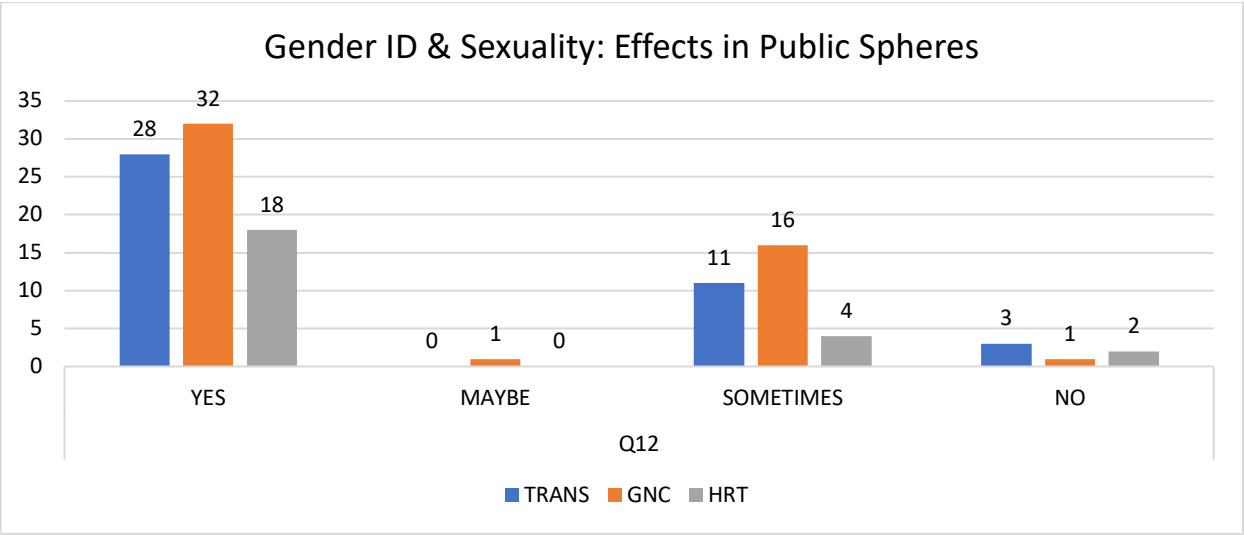
Figure 8



With this understanding of major influences on transgender and GNC young adults' conceptualization of and experience with their own gender identities and sexualities, the following figure helps us to visualize the impact that public and private spheres have on this population. Below, Figure 9 shows a visual distribution bf the effects of gender identity and sexuality in public settings, with responses broken down by core categories.

Question 13: Do you feel that your gender identity and/or sexuality affect your experiences in public spheres? (e.g. grocery store, college campus, park)

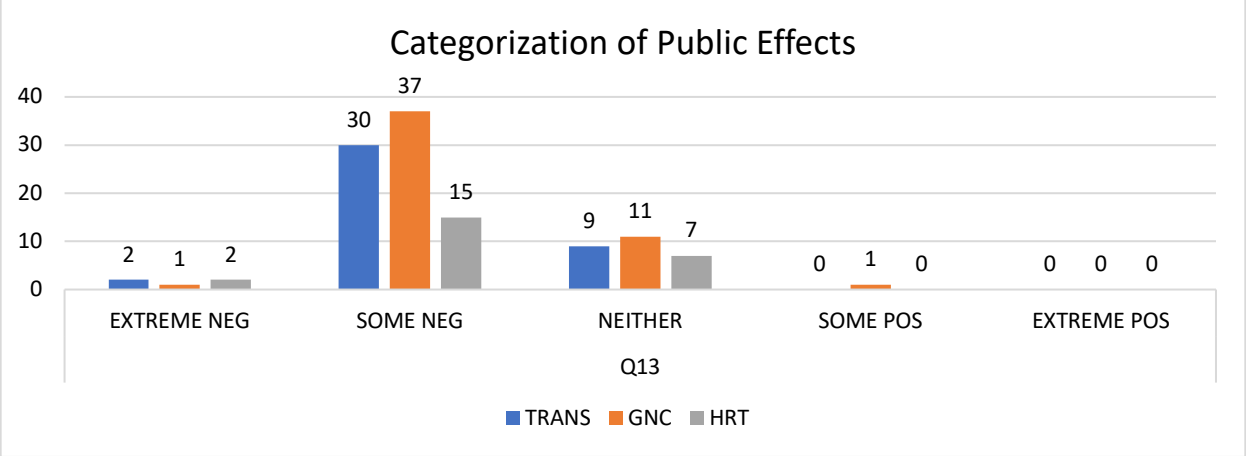
Figure 9



Following this investigation of gender identity and sexuality affects in public settings, the next question asked respondents to categorize the nature of their public experiences on a scale from *extremely negative* to *extremely positive*. A majority of respondents classified their experiences in public settings as *somewhat negative*, with nearly all remaining respondents' experiences falling under *neither*. For all categories, GNC respondents were more likely to identify their experiences in public as related to their gender expression, identity, or sexuality, as well as negative in some way. In Figure 10, the distribution between the core categories can be seen, broken down along the response scale for this question.

Question 14: If so, is this affect negative, positive, or neutral?

Figure 10

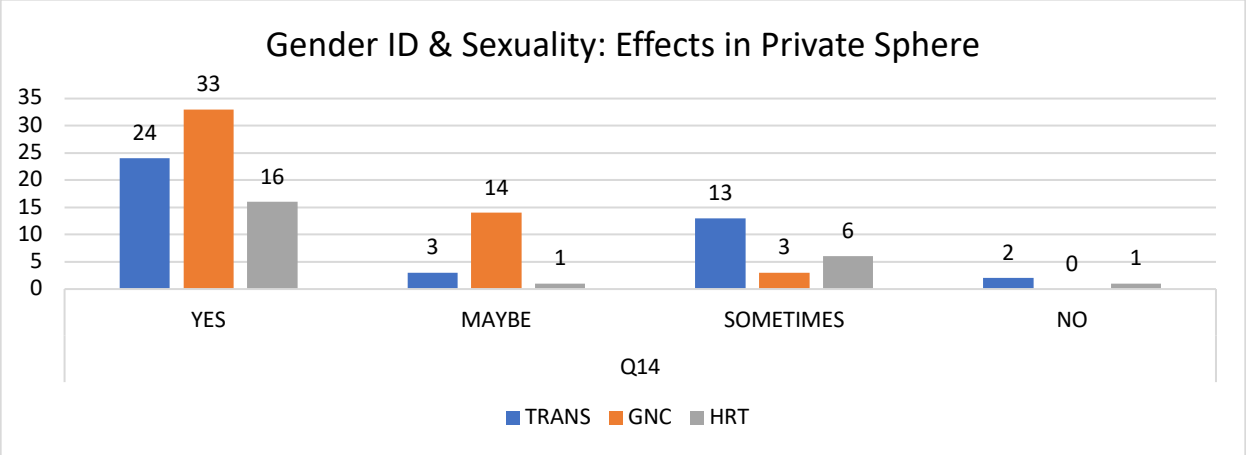


To understand another crucial dimension of respondents' experiences with gender identity and sexuality, the survey asked respondents to consider their experience with gender identity and sexuality in private settings. This set of questions was structured very similarly to the set concerning public settings, with identical response scales intended to encourage

respondents to consider their responses in the context of experiences in both public and private settings. For this set of questions, respondents were more likely to identify their gender identity and sexuality as having measurable effects on their private lives; a majority of respondents identified this effect in some way, with 97% selecting *sometimes, maybe,* or *yes*. Figure 11 illustrates the distribution of respondents by core categories.

Question 15: Do you feel that your gender identity and/or sexuality affect your experiences in private spheres? (e.g. at home, in the workplace)

Figure 11

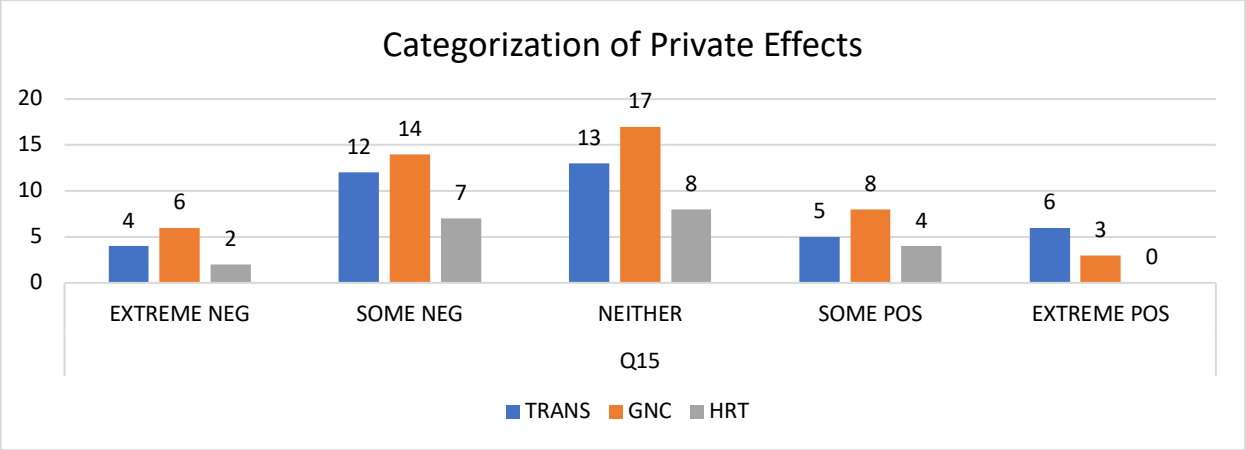


Through the lens of private settings, respondents were asked again to categorize their lived experiences on a scale of *extremely negative* to *extremely positive.* Figure 12 shows a varied division along core categories. For each response, GNC respondents were more likely to identify their private experience as negative or neutral; transgender respondents were second-most likely to do so. A majority of respondents, at 73%, selected either *somewhat negative* or *neutral*, signaling that the effects of gender identity and sexuality on transgender and GNC

young people are more likely to be negative and/or not a benefit to them in social situations – and tend to influence their experiences in private settings in a negative way.

Question 16: If so, is this affect negative, positive, or neutral?

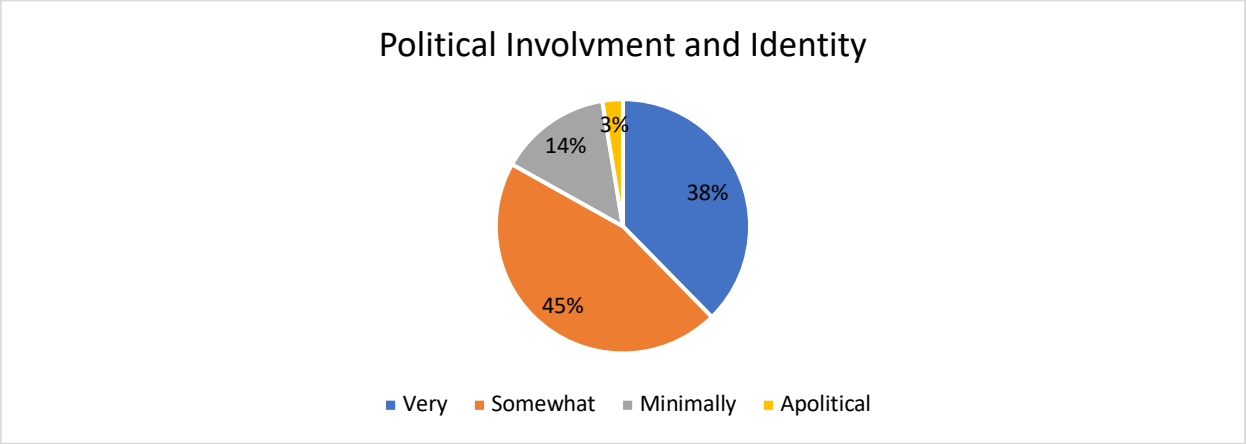
Figure 12



Because politicization of an individual's identity significantly affects the way they perceive themselves and navigate the world around them, it is critical to understand how respondents characterize themselves in relation to political involvement and identity. Respondents were asked to classify their political involvement along a scale from *apolitical* to *very political*. A majority of respondents, at 83%, categorized themselves as either *very* or *somewhat* politically involved; Figure 13 helps us to visualize this distribution.

Question 19: How involved in politics are you?

Figure 13

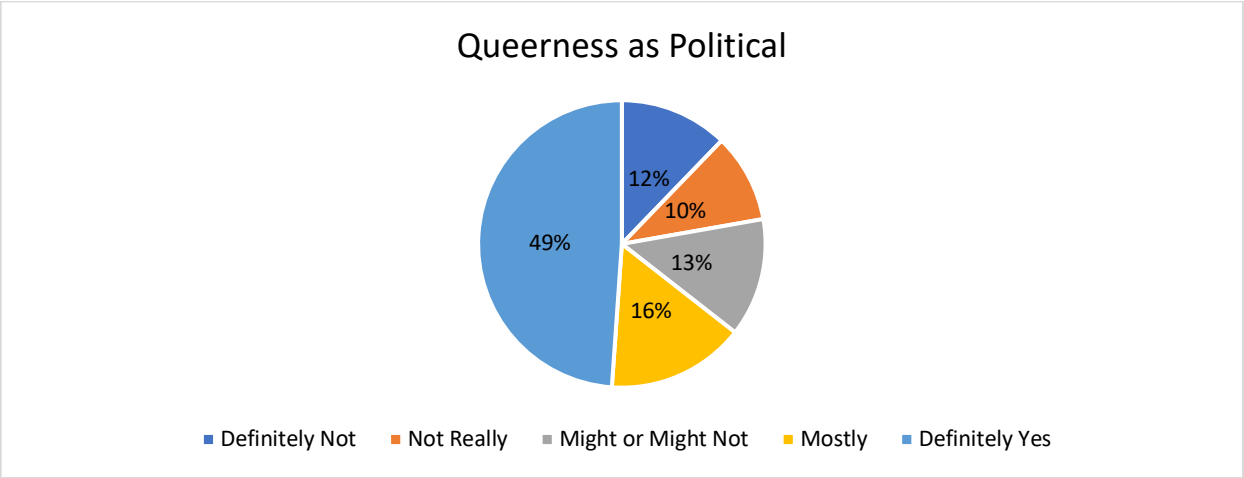


Following this consideration of political involvement and identity, respondents were asked to categorize the degree to which they consider the term *queer* to be political. Rooted firmly in feminist theory, queer theory, and sociopolitical literature and analysis, *queer* is both a reclaimed term[85] and a conceptualization of non-normative and non-conforming identity; all respondents that identified within the three core categories are considered *queer* under the definitions of queerness that frame this analysis and research. One such dimension of *queer* is the ways in which queerness is political; that is, it is divested from power, normativity, and structures of oppression in a way that makes it inherently political. To understand how respondents conceptualize queerness, both their own and as a term, they were prompted to classify their perceptions of such. Figure 14 helps us to visualize the distribution of respondents along a scale from *definitely not* to *definitely yes*.

[85] Merrill Perlman, 2019

Question 20: Do you think your queer identity is political?

Figure 14



Data in Context

While this survey was effective in prompting respondents to answer a series of preliminary, generally basic questions, a future survey would be able to tease apart different, more specific terms and conceptualizations related to gender identity, sexuality, and non-conformity. A larger survey might be able to aid in understanding a breakdown of responses for transmasculine, transfeminine, and intersex respondents, as well as discrete ways in which political involvement correlates with public and private experiences as influenced by gender identity and sexuality.[86] In addition, a future survey could focus more on investigating the difference in responses based on physical and behavioral characteristics, and how they might impact public and private perception differently. A future survey might also be more specific

[86] The following subsection is in part drawn from the following:
Rosanova, M. (2022). A New Lens: Trans-Focused Praxis For Better Analysis [Unpublished research project-analysis].

when defining characteristics, both in specifying that they are/not observable or external in nature.

Modern feminist-political theory identifies intersectional approaches to research and policy as critical to completely understanding the effects of transphobia and other forms of oppression on transgender communities.[87] As feminist-political theorists and medical professionals alike have moved away from pathological definitions of queer identity, the understanding that conservative definitions of transsexuality are limited in authenticity by their dependency on medicalized, essentialized understandings of gender and sex, particularly under normative assumptions of whiteness, class privilege, and access to education, has become widely accepted.[88]

Following this widespread shift in feminist, sociopolitical academic consciousness, research exploring factors for violence against transgender communities expanded significantly. Theoretical conversations have begun to move past transgender viability in legal and political spheres to include minority stress frameworks – structures to help researchers understand and analyze minority health disparities – to understand oppressive factors at the intersection of transgender identity and other marginalized identifiers.[89] By recognizing face and utilizing this evidence to directly address anti-transgender violence, contemporary feminist and political theory seeks to understand transgender communities not just through a heteronormative Western lens, but through a queer political framework designed to dismantle oppression at its source rather than simply develop methods of survival within.[90]

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[87] Lutz, 2015 & Ahmed, 2021
[88] Halberstam, 1998
[89] Arayasirikul & Wilson, 2018; Nayak, 2021
[90] Lenning, Brightman, & Buist, 2021

The increased frequency in studies focused on anti-transgender violence helps to clarify tangible legal, social, and political needs of transgender communities globally. Most often, federal institutions are hesitant to support marginalized communities if there is little formal, widely accepted evidence of difficulty; in the case of transgender individuals, their existence and access to basic human rights in the majority of recognized nations is still widely disputed, directly undermining institutional support.[91] Case studies seeking to identify and document violence against transgender communities have been critical to garnering institutional support and legal protections through identification as a vulnerable population.[92] By categorizing transgender individuals as vulnerable, advocacy groups and feminist-political scholars alike are able to link anti-transgender violence and related rhetoric to other struggles with oppression, such as racism, sexism, and class struggles.[93]

While engaging in rights-based advocacy through labeling marginalized populations as vulnerable is an effective way to advance protections for transgender populations, it sacrifices autonomy and self-determination for frequently politicized and pathologized identity labels. Labeling transgender populations as vulnerable, gender affirming care as medically sound, and transgender-based violence as a human rights violation are all tangible, factual assertions; however, contemporary LGBTQ+ rights advocacy relies on rights-based arguments over autonomy and liberation-based movements, undermining long-term safety and community longevity for short-term successes. Current legal and policy-based advocacy widely operates under the assumption that capitalism, colonialism, and institutions of whiteness and wealth will continue to hold their power in the long term – but by appealing to institutions of power and

[91] Hines, 2019
[92] Rodríguez-Madera et. al., 2017
[93] Sutton & Borland, 2018; Bochicchio et. al., 2018

seeking validation through oppressive forces, rather than as rooted in liberatory ideals, these rights-based approaches sacrifice a movement's most marginalized[94] for the safety of a few.

Through evidentiary discourse, the positive impact on transgender-focused research and theorizing is tangible, and according to feminist-political thinkers, is critical to not only the support of and advocacy for transgender communities, but for the liberation of these communities from institutional oppressive forces as well.[95] It is crucial, now more than ever, to reject essentialist, exclusionary arguments, and analysis in favor of seeking understanding of oppressive forces along multiple axes. Future research must orient its inquiry on multi-praxis analysis; the inclusion of multiple sociopolitical factors in analysis, while more complex, is necessary to adequately understand the violence that marginalized communities face.

By prioritizing intersectional, multi-praxis analysis and incorporating established understandings of oppressive power structures in U.S. politics, research focused on benefitting marginalized populations can not only generate comprehensive data for advocacy but serve to fill historic and contemporary gaps in data collection due to racialized and gendered omission. With an awareness of the necessity for intersectional research practices and analysis, contemporary research must reject the norm that analysis can occur only on a single praxis. Research that seeks to understand marginalizing rhetoric must continue to develop despite increasingly volatile sociopolitical attitudes, especially through a queer political lens that encompasses nonconformity and narrative in a wholistic, accessible way.

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[94] Consider mainstream gay rights in the 2010's, transgender people were told to "wait their turn"; now, during the push for transgender rights, sex workers and QT POC are being told to wait their turn or to "become acceptable".
[95] MacDonald, 1998

Part III

During the formulation of this research project, I wanted to be sure that I captured the *humanity* in all of this. In a sociopolitical time where fascism is on the rise[96], democratic ideals are frequently co-opted for capitalistic gain[97], and minority populations are undermined, exploited, and subject to genocide[98], it is easy to lose sight of the humanity of those around us, whether we have ideological or identity-based common ground or not.

While the crux of this project's argument lies in identifying, clarifying, and advocating for the benefits of including critical theory, in all its forms, in research on a broad level, I will admit that this project is still largely academic and merit-minded. But while this pedagogical lens is crucial to appealing to a wider audience of academics, researchers, and politicians alike, I feel it necessary to include the narratives of transgender people who are real – living, existing, and thriving despite widespread attempts to diminish their quality of life and strip them of their rights, and in many ways, their humanity.

In the following oral histories, conducted over the course of February and March 2023, you will have the opportunity to consider the reflections of Nicky and G, two self-identified transgender/gender non-conforming people in their late twenties. I met with them for about an hour each; with Nicky in person, and with G virtually, due to geographical distance. Of the questions I asked them[99], I will highlight a specific few below.

The Personal is Political… Or Is It?

[96] Jack Bratich, 2022
[97] Robert Kuttner, 2018.
[98] Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention, 2022
[99] See Appendix A.

When discussing their own queer identity, Nicky and G both identified their experiences with coming out and navigating their identities as a largely personal endeavor. Nicky shared ways in which their identity became more political in nature as their understanding of the world developed.

N: At the time, I didn't understand them as political, but finding safety in my trans identity meant having to learn history and the political struggles, and in the years following my coming out as trans, it became impossible to see those parts of my identity as only personal and not political. My initial understanding was personal, but as I understood myself and the world, I came to understand that those social masculinizations are deeply political.

Where Nicky's perception of their queer identity shifted towards the political out of necessity, G views their shifting queer identity as very interrelated to their reception by others in social situations. Below, G shares how opening up about their queer identity has affected the way they view this part of themself.

G: At this point, based on where we are as a society, it's pretty inextricably linked to politics in a way that heterosexual and cisgender people get to be immune because they're so normalized. But the process of coming out to other people is more political in trying to gauge who's going to be open to me sharing this part of myself. Elevating concerns lately, as trans bills become the hot topic. In the beginning of my gender journey, drag and "switching genders" sometimes came up, but it wasn't something people knew about.

Although these perspectives are two of many with regards to queerness and its political dimensions, Nicky and G's ruminations on the ways in which their initial coming out experiences and subsequent development in both their identities, and the ways their interpersonal interactions, continue to shift. Both Nicky and G shared journeys from very personal coming out experiences to a more worldly perspective – but their reasons for adopting a more politically-minded perspective vary, from rooting their experiences in queer history to contextualizing their identity in the way they are received by others.

Matters of Whiteness

While race wasn't the focus of these oral interviews, both Nicky and G's reflections found their way to ideas of race and whiteness on their own. As two white-identifying individuals, Nicky and G both included race in their descriptions of the political dimension of queerness; in particular, they were quick to note racialized social and political interactions as formative to their own political consciousness in some way.

N: I understand the history of trans movements to be movements in which trans people's lives and safety are deeply connected to the safety of people we are not. As a trans person, my life, and safety is deeply connected to the safety of even cis het Black men because the danger in being human in public is danger for both of us. The logics that deny us for denying norms are the same logics that police Black men for being Black in public. There are other examples, but that has been most clear in my lifetime. It's interesting – trans identity began as a very emotional, introspective thing – but I have begun to see it as political, political structure, and political antagonism.

G: When I think of organizing, I think of QT+BIPOC siblings. Because they have the least to lose, and because they have the least. If they had more capital, what would that look like? I can't help but think. The fight for gay marriage is a good example of people with a certain view of what the community needs and that being the ability to marry – and then to see a lot of things slow down after that and to know different communities are an afterthought 10 years later – just to think about our own history and the mainstream narrative – when we look at it, it tells a lot of stories.

Their relationship to whiteness differs, however, when it comes to moving outside themselves, from their own internal reflections to applying their personal ideologies. While both Nicky and G are aware of the identity-related implications of being white and LGBTQ+, they diverge when considering the way that whiteness protects them – or doesn't – in practicality.

G: I don't know if this comes up with others, but I feel the pressure to not be that person sometimes. I have a pretty cool BLM sign, but I haven't found a place to put it. Trying not to draw too [much] attention to myself, but knowing I already have by being queer and trans. Being in Kansas specifically – what is safe, what's uncomfortable, as a white person there's so much around BLM – how do I make sure I'm being safe but not leaning into my own privilege?

N: For me it was impossible for me to come into myself and my professional life as an educator without an acute analysis that the education system and the world hates Black people in particular. I organized with an abolitionist group called No New Youth Jail, who's purpose was to move that money away from incarceration and re-resource schools that had been divested from.

The contrast between Nicky and G's approach towards engaging with their own whiteness and the very real threat of white supremacy highlights a few of many perspectives and divisions that appear in the LGBTQ+ community. While the LGBTQ+ community is marginalized, there are still protections afforded to white queers that are withheld from queer and trans People of Color (QT+POC), with the most vulnerable being Black transgender women[100]. Many white LGBTQ+ people remain unaware of – or unmotivated to address – the ways in which their whiteness protects them from anti-Black and anti-Indigenous violence, despite having the experience of harassment and discrimination based on their queer identity[101].

Self-Identity and Matters of Perception

In combination with an analysis of the ways in which Nicky and G relate to the sociopolitical world around them, I find the ways that they describe their personal experience with self-identification and reception by others to be similarly critical to understanding Nicky and G fully. The benefit of including analytical and internally reflective dimensions of a marginalized individual or identity in our analyses can be seen clearly through this holistic approach, which includes both sociopolitical reflections and internal/external perceptions.

N: I have a logical attachment to queer, from a political perspective. I'm [in] the school of life that sees queer as a political word – but not as a catchall…consider Black feminist readings of queer – queer is an antagonist to the structure of power. Trans, because I like asserting that non-binary people are included in trans umbrella – in the company of cis people. Non-binary for me feels most at home – describes my personal identity most

[100] Human Rights Watch, 2021
[101] Center for American Progress, 2021

clearly – the rejection of the two normed genders in me, that's who I am – people get worked up by non-binary, so I don't use it very often, but that's what I feel most at home in.

G: As far as sexuality, a lot of my early life and young adulthood was spent figuring out the gender pieces, so that wasn't at the forefront. Queer fits where I'm at this point, and the ambiguity. It was very much growing up as a tomboy and never growing out of that phase and struggling to reconcile what the path ahead of me was in terms of... I was dating this really great guy, but at one point we were talking and he said something about not proposal, per se, but I didn't want to be his wife. Realizing it had nothing to do with him, but more to do with my gender.

Where Nicky struggled with defining her proximity to masculinity and the idea being palatable in their queerness, G existed in gender non-conformity from an early age, with a critical gender realization emerging in juxtaposition from traditional expectations of marriage. I find it particularly interesting that, though Nicky is most comfortable within the term non-binary, she is acutely aware of the term's politicized nature and is therefore sparing with its use. By noticing ways in which marginalized communities police themselves, just as oppressive forces do, we can notice the ways that Nicky's experience with using "non-binary" or "trans" as an identity label is representative of a pervasive issue of policing and acceptability within the queer community.

Ultimately, it is absolutely necessary to balance academic analysis with interpersonal insight gained from observing the lived experience of the population(s) at the center of a research project. Where data collection and analysis generate concrete observations about marginalized populations that can and do fuel (or stymie) political discourse, resource allocation, and social attitudes, we cannot truly understand social phenomenon without comprehending the experiences of individuals that are living it. To read the full transcripts of these interviews, see Appendix B.

Conclusion

Even as this is written, the influences, stakeholders, and crucial elements in the American political system are shifting, the ever-fluid nature of this structure that is so controlled by capitalism, white supremacy, and agonizing individuality becoming more apparent than ever before. With this understanding, however, those responsible for generating the data critical to decision-making and patterns of social and political prioritization must avoid complicity in these oppressive structures of power through centering the identities most at risk in their studies. All research done today effects marginalized populations in some way; studying the effects of climate change based upon geographical location directly affects majority-Black cities and low-income areas, research about competent health care is not complete without including transgender and queer individuals, and generating data about voting engagement and residential patterns for the purpose of redistricting must acknowledge gerrymandering and its effects on Black and Brown populations. In other words, research must be comprehensive – not just in methodology, but in content, intention, delivery, and community impact.

Ultimately, traditional research practices and data generation conventions have been steeped in systems of oppression and racialized sociopolitical ideology, and must shift with the needs of the most marginalized communities both historically, and in our time. Because research is used to justify policy, resource allocation, and social patterns, it is necessary for parties on all sides – those who produce the questions, execute the analysis, and incorporate the data are all complicit in any positive change – or political violence – that happens as a result. In not only acknowledging this dimension of our work, but also interrogating it, understanding it, and applying it, researchers can hold a larger system of stakeholders accountable to values of equity and inclusion that most powerful players seek to profit from, but largely ignore. By incorporating

feminist, anti-racist, abolitionist theory into research at every step from conception to presentation, it is possible to continue this shift from discrimination-serving findings to justification for deep-seated social change – and ultimately, towards liberation those at the margins and everywhere in between.

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Appendix A

1. What is your name?
2. Would you like to share your pronouns, if any?
3. Do you identify as transgender, gender non-conforming, or queer?
4. Tell me about your relationship to your transgender, gender non-conforming, and/or queer identity?

5. Would you be willing to share about yourself as a part of this oral history? Please share anything you are comfortable with. This can include anything that you feel is relevant to this oral history about transgender and gender non-conforming experiences.

6. Do you view your transgender/gender non-conforming/queer identity as political? Why or why not?
7. How do you feel about queer as an identity label? Because it is a reclaimed term, do you find it more political than, say, transgender or gender non-conforming?

8. If you view your transgender/queer identity as political, when did you start viewing yourself as such?
9. If you view your transgender/queer identity as political, do you consider yourself involved in politics?
10. If so, what does any potential political involvement look for you?
    a. The interviewer might prompt the participant to consider both daily engagement and broad patterns and habits.

11. Increasingly, the personal lives of transgender/ gender non-conforming/queer people are politicized and compared to normative expectations.
    a. How do you see this manifest in your daily life?
    b. The interviewer might prompt the participant to consider how transgender/gender non-conforming/queer identity affects other roles/identities, such as family, education, occupation, and community.
12. Do you consider yourself politically engaged? Why or why not?
    a. Is this (political engagement) different to you than political involvement? If so, why?

13. Do you think there is enough political engagement within the LGBTQ+ community?
14. What about within other marginalized communities? Why or why not?
15. Given your experience as a transgender, gender non-conforming and/or queer person, do you think that current approaches to political engagement and advocacy for marginalized groups are working? Why or why not?
16. If you think current approaches are working, what should social justice advocates continue to do? If you don't think they are working, what can be done differently?

Appendix B

Full Transcripts of Oral Interviews

Interview #1

MW: What is your name?

N: Nicky.

MW: Would you like to share your pronouns, if any?

N: They or she.

MW: Do you identify as transgender, gender non-conforming, or queer?

N: All three – I tend to use trans and queer most often, but sometimes I use non-binary.

MW: Tell me about your relationship to your transgender, gender non-conforming, and/or queer identity?

N: I have a logical attachment to queer, from a political perspective. I'm [in] the school of life that sees queer as a political word – but not as a catchall…consider black feminist readings of queer – queer is an antagonist to the structure of power. Trans, because I like asserting that non-binary people are included in trans umbrella – in the company of cis people. Non-binary for me feels most at home – describes my personal identity most clearly – the rejection of the two normed genders in me, that's who I am – people get worked up by non-binary, so I don't use it very often, but that's what I feel most at home in.

MW: Do you view your transgender/gender non-conforming/queer identity as political? Why or why not?

N: For me, when I came out as trans, it felt very personal. In the way that my becoming as trans was related to the way that I had been brought up as a man, and me rejecting that, especially around emotional intimacy, both in being emotionally close to others and expressing joy. My emotional masculinization – men are not allowed to relate to anyone emotionally and are not allowed to express joy or curiosity or eagerness – and so my coming out as trans was a rejection of that very internal part of my socialization. My coming out as trans didn't have as much to do with rejecting my body or presentation – that came much later for me. At the time, I didn't understand them as political, but finding safety in my trans identity meant having to learn history and the political struggles, and in the years following my coming out as trans, it became impossible to see those parts of my identity as only personal and not political. My initial understanding was personal, but as I understood myself and the world, I came to understand that those social masculinizations are deeply political. I understand the history of trans movements to be movements in which trans people's lives and safety are deeply connected to the safety of people we are not. As a trans person, my life and safety is deeply connected to the safety of even cis het Black men because the danger in being human in public is danger for both of us. The logics that deny us for denying norms are the same logics that police Black men for being Black in public. There are other examples, but that has been most clear in my lifetime. It's interesting – trans identity began as a very emotional, introspective thing – but I have begun to see it as political, political structure, and political antagonism.

MW: How do you feel about queer as an identity label? Because it is a reclaimed term, do you find it more political than, say, transgender or gender non-conforming?

N: It's definitely the most political of the words and it has a political history. People really started claiming queer in the 90's during the angsty occupy movement[102]. A really important moment in my political awakening was Cathy [J.] Cohen's *Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens* [1997], where she makes the specific claim that, at the time, mainstream focus in the gay rights movement towards marriage equality, she talks about in the heat of the AIDS crisis this contradiction between an overwhelming focus in mainstream media in gay spaces at the same time as queer people were dying. And at that time it wasn't gay white cis men who were dying the most from AIDS; it was sex workers, people in prisons, and immigrants afraid to get healthcare – the most vulnerable. She critiques sexual identity as an organizing principle – ["]what if we used queer instead to wrap up all these people who have a strong motivation to criticize and oppose those in power["]? The political structure in the U.S. right now is obsessed with trans people. It's true that the moves to attack trans people are restricting affirming care and policing kids in sports and bathrooms, which are all very embodied mechanisms of control for trans people, but we are also seeing drag bans and regressive curriculum oversight – it's interesting. I don't have a clear sense of why, [why] these attacks now, beyond control. A warped set of ideals.

MW: If you view your transgender/queer identity as political, when did you start viewing yourself as such?

N: I had this very assimilationist politic when I was growing up – I did speech and debate in high school and I got some fucked up values about what a person who's worthy of respect looks like – I used to wear suits in high school and college, and I thought that dressing and speaking and performing in a particular way would force people to listen to me. People in power. I remember this as early as [early high school]. This is still true broadly. There's a lot of attention, and was, at [that] time on queer kids committing suicide. I went to the high school in Montana that had the highest rate of suicide. Every year, a kid would commit [suicide]. I remember feeling so pressured to be a version of myself that would be palatable to an administrator who didn't give a shit about gay kids killing themselves. That politic of being palatable to power continued to college. The desire to appease or to impress people who are in control would never serve me. It is never a successful organizing tactic. And worse, it actually creates it; like, I found myself being used at the expense of others that were more vulnerable.

When I was in high school, there were maybe three out gay men I'll speak about, and I'm included. Three of us, and one of them was very femme, and I mean femme – like [in] his mannerisms and dressed femme, in drama, he was like Kurt [from GLEE], and he had developed a number of coping and defense mechanisms that were very abrasive – he was very queeny with people and was sassy and mean. He was, like, a "faggot" – I distanced myself so much from him and used him as, like, a[n] "I'm gay but not *that* gay". From straight friends, I'd hear "it's okay, you're gay we don't notice, you're not *that* gay." I didn't notice 'til later, but I closened up to masculinity in a way that caused more harm. There was no reason to alienate myself from him – we are the same. In Montana, which is largely racially homogenous[103], this dynamic plays out in racialized ways as well – the reasonable white gay being used against a Black woman. It became clear to me in college that I never wanted to be that. It is hard, but important, to not allow your body to be used against other people.

MW: If you view your transgender/queer identity as political, do you consider yourself involved in politics?

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[102] Perlman
[103] United States Census Bureau

N: I started organizing when I was in college; I studied music in college, and I did our version of student teaching. I went to a little liberal arts school, so [there was] no certification, but I spent a semester at Washington High School, in the redline district of Seattle. [It was] largely Black, and largely immigrant. Importantly, it was also two or three blocks from the King County Youth Detention Center – Seattle metropolitan area is city, but there's a youth detention center for the whole county [there]. The youth detention center for the county happens to be in the middle of the city and in the redline district of Seattle, which is not an accident. While I was at Washington High School there were several things at play – the Seattle city council passed an initiative to stop incarcerating youth. In the following year, King County (named after MLK Jr., mind you) committed $230 million to expanding this youth jail for kids, at the same time as the Seattle public school system had a $70 million deficit. The county invested four times that amount in a jail for kids. There are layers of hypocrisy and racism that were a part of my coming of age and my training. And I should also say that in the back/foreground of this, there was wave upon wave of murders of Black men, which was an important part of my training. High profile murders of Black men by the police. For me it was impossible for me to come into myself and my professional life as an educator without an acute analysis that the education system and the world hates Black people in particular. I organized with an abolitionist group called No New Youth Jail, who's purpose was to move that money away from incarceration and re-resource schools that had been divested from. Developing an abolitionist politic was a really important part of my early life and early formation of a human. And since then, I have been involved, I consider myself involved politically in a number of ways. Every time I think it can't get worse it does, [and] I have a growing disenfranchisement from the U.S. political system, the electoral system in general. My first election was 2016, so I've never experienced a legitimate election. My entire adult life, I've never had my being so litigated at the highest levels of government. So how can I have any trust or any credibility for an institution like that? So, that's hard. I consider myself very politically active. I'm still involved in community organizing.

MW: Increasingly, the personal lives of transgender/ gender non-conforming/queer people are politicized and compared to normative expectations. How do you see this manifest in your daily life?

N: So there's a professional organization for musicians that I'm a part of – I'm the DEI chair for Arizona for this organization. One time, I'd been there for a year, everyone was giving introductions, and I said "oh and I'm the director of a performing arts program for queer youth called THEM youth ensemble". A cis man kind of like soft-conversation interrupts me to say "oh, you mean like they/them pronouns?" He just wanted to assert to me that he knew about they/them [pronouns]. There's nothing you can really say at that point except for, "yep". That's every day. People aggressively hating me, or people aggressively wanting to show that they understand the barest minimum of who I am. That's an interesting thing.

There's this book called *Trans Care* by Hil Malatino [2020]. He's a cool trans man – [the] book was very helpful, and he talks about this dynamic of expecting people to be professionally trans. I'm feeling that deeply. In my early career, I spoke and did a fair amount of scholarship about trans competence. I did that out of self-preservation, not because it was a huge professional passion of mine. I did it to have more security in spaces I was in, for my safety every day. He makes the case that trans people in every situation, every role, have had to play the role of educator [and] ambassador to be themselves and go to work every day. Now, I'm very critical of DEI and trans 101 trainings actually doing anything – if they have teeth to transform behavior. I'm also interested in other things – I hate doing trans 101s!

In January, I did trans 101 for all the music teachers in a school district in Tucson. And it was fine, [but] the thing about it is I have to put my body on display – "here's trans things and here's a trans person!" And I have to explain myself in a way that I don't feel comfortable doing most of the time. It's fine, I did that, it was well received. A teacher came up to me afterwards, [and] said "thank you so much, I learned a lot. I'd love for you to come to my classroom and work with my students." Which, this is a part of my literal job.

When I got there, she he/him'd me the whole time. I'm particular in certain teaching things that are now best practice in a field – [for example] using *treble/bass* or *soprano, alto, tenor, bass* – and I was monitoring that. This teacher would recast every instruction I gave with gender. Two things at play – one, my training didn't do anything. This person had no accountability to the things that I took an agonizing hour out of my day to be a trans zoo for them – and two, she actually walked away from that training thinking that she did her good deed for the day by listening to a trans person. This is a dynamic that I see very often. Cis people get a lot of cultural capital for the bare minimum. Often, because it takes some labor to be in relationship with trans people, cis people don't do the labor and get to pat themselves on the back.

MW: Do you consider yourself politically engaged? Why or why not? Is this (political engagement) different to you than political involvement? If so, why?

N: So I just went to a conference for LGBT movement workers or non-profits – and I'm not trying to talk shit, but there was a person who got a big award, an older white trans woman. And for her acceptance speech, she talked almost the entire time about Joe Biden's Equality Act, and the need for people to get behind the Equality Act. I actually think that's damaging to buy in and focus organizing efforts on government entities and electoral systems that will never have the potential to affirm queer life. It's a red herring. Joe Biden is a distraction. He will never – the institution of Joe Biden will never create the environment for queer people to thrive. It's out of the realm of possibility. Putting our movement energy into Joe Biden is a waste of time, and divests from things that actually can happen. It's an abolitionist value. Organizing for body cams was proven not to prevent police violence, and [it] is a waste of time and takes away from things that could actually impact things for impacted people. I do notice this trend for people really believing in the electoral system, when it's bought out and a failure. Why do we put energy there? And why do we believe the U.S. Congress will suddenly give a shit about queer people?
Yes, social media activism is tied [in]. I took a class in college about queer social movements. The professor had organized in direct actions. His approach [was] – "I recognize that we are all developing our political analysis, and it's important to practice language political and also political language about our own bodies, but yelling at your friends on Facebook is not activism and it's not organizing." And that's hard! Because many of us have a value of agitating in situations that are wrong. But that doesn't mean that posting an Audre Lorde article is social justice. That's not it. I think it's great that Gen Z in particular has a really acute political analysis. The young people I work with have very sophisticated analysis of the world. And also, I believe it's intentional that we are not taught to organize for change, or make actionable demands, or build coalition across difference. We are not taught to have nuanced conversation about different, [or] even shared values. There are people I consider absolute comrades, that I'd be in the streets with and for, and we disagree strongly about organizing tactics but we have shared values that ground our relationship. And that took years to develop those skills and organize across difference. It's been easy to see Instagram activism as it, but it's not.

MW: Do you think there is enough political engagement within the LGBTQ+ community? What about within other marginalized communities? Why or why not?

N: White gays are the worst. A lot of white gays, I'll be honest, in this moment, don't see that everyone is vulnerable. Obergefell, not that I give a shit about it, is about to be overturned. I think that political organizing is high among people who understand that the stakes are high. It's not clear to everyone that the stakes are high. Some people – LGBT people too – have been more protected in the last two decades. People whose stakes have always been high – incarcerated people and immigrants – know it.

MW: Given your experience as a transgender, gender non-conforming and/or queer person, do you think that current approaches to political engagement and advocacy for marginalized groups are working? Why or

why not? If you think current approaches are working, what should social justice advocates continue to do? If you don't think they are working, what can be done differently?

N: I think it's true that the only political organization in the history of the U.S., on the timeline of oppressed people, is direct action. Letter writing and legislative lobbying will never serve oppressed people. I think in order for queer people to be in charge of our own political outcomes, we need to be more robust about organizing. We need to be in the streets with clear asks, and we need to be applying pressure to people in power so Democrats can stop patting themselves on the back for doing the bare minimum. I don't see any point to anything except for direct action, and mutual aid, with the end that they can be mobilized into direct action campaigns.

Interview #2:

MW: What is your name?

G: I'll go by G for this.

MW: Would you like to share your pronouns, if any?

G: I just go by my name.

MW: Do you identify as transgender, gender non-conforming, or queer?

G: I identify as trans and queer.

MW: Tell me about your relationship to your transgender, gender non-conforming, and/or queer identity?

G: Within the trans umbrella, I identify as transmasculine or transmasc – it fits me best. I was AFAB [assigned female at birth but identify as transmasculine. As far as sexuality, a lot of my early life and young adulthood was spent figuring out the gender pieces, so that wasn't at the forefront. Queer fits where I'm at this point, and the ambiguity.

MW: Do you view your transgender/gender non-conforming/queer identity as political? Why or why not?

G: I think a lot of it is contextual. Ultimately, yes. But there are pieces ,like queer/trans joy, that are apolitical when they are most liberatory. So while they're inextricably connected, they're not always pride rallies and house bills – this sort of direct political engagement. At this point, based on where we are as a society, it's pretty inextricably linked to politics in a way that heterosexual and cisgender people get to be immune because they're so normalized.

MW: How do you feel about queer as an identity label? Because it is a reclaimed term, do you find it more political than, say, transgender or gender non-conforming?

G: Trans is the most political right now, just because of all of the state legislative proposals that are popping up, mostly to make it harder to be trans. That's the most political right now. I had an interesting experience in grad school; I had this professor, and he was in his 60's and 70's and he really doesn't like the word queer. And I can respect that. And it becomes this thing where how can we respect where people and

trauma are at and how we respect young people. I think for me, it's about being sensitive and trying to make room for everybody, coming from that place of inclusion.

MW: If you view your transgender/queer identity as political, when did you start viewing yourself as such?

G: Well, for me, coming into my identity was not political. It was very much growing up as a tomboy and never growing out of that phase and struggling to reconcile what the path ahead of me was in terms of... I was dating this really great guy, but at one point we were talking and he said something about not proposal, per se, but I didn't want to be his wife. Realizing it had nothing to do with him, but more to do with my gender. That was apolitical. But the process of coming out to other people is more political in trying to gauge who's going to be open to me sharing this part of myself. Elevating concerns lately, as trans bills become the hot topic. In the beginning of my gender journey, drag and "switching genders" sometimes came up, but it wasn't something people knew about. It wasn't common in the circles I existed in. It's become politicized in a whole new way in the last 6+ years.

MW: If you view your transgender/queer identity as political, do you consider yourself involved in politics?

G: I would say I'm not very involved in politics. But I do consider myself very civically minded. I try to pay attention to what's going on around me. I've encouraged all the young people in my life to register to vote, whether they do or not, but don't do yourself the disservice of not registering if you choose to. How am I showing up as a good/community member? It's looked very different at different points in my life. In San Francisco, it was a lot easier to be directly involved based on opportunities and people in my circles. At this point, I'm not super political, but I try to keep up with what's going on, especially with Supreme Court cases being heard. And it's a lot. But if there's one that makes my attention, I tune in.

MW: If so, what does any potential political involvement look for you? Increasingly, the personal lives of transgender/ gender non-conforming/queer people are politicized and compared to normative expectations. How do you see this manifest in your daily life?

G: One of the things about being queer and trans is that sort of coming into my transness and queerness helped me understand the politics of society that I didn't before. Awareness for myself. A lot of issues for myself around race and class became more significant to me as a result of growing up, but also as someone on the margins of society. When you're further removed from social and political capital, it becomes easier to see who else is removed and care about it. It's not oppression olympics – a rising tide lifts all boats. So if we have opportunities to rectify injustices around different identities, awesome – and it's part of being, in my opinion, a good person. The people who aren't being served the way other people are. To use the trans community as an example, we can be open loud and proud, but that isn't going to be enough votes in a democracy. Literal votes on the ballot.

MW: Consider how transgender/gender non-conforming/queer identity affects other roles/identities, such as family, education, occupation, and community. How does this show up for you?

G: Sometimes it's exhausting – that's how it shows up. Wanting to normalize not assigning pronouns or gender, but not being the person to bring up "we don't know this person's gender or pronouns" and so, I almost think of it as taking turns being that voice. That way, it's not always a single person speaking up for what we can do better or ways we might being perpetuating normativities.
I had a really interesting moment with a supervisor recently – he sent out an asynchronous meeting agenda – [and] at the end, he said he started playing Hogwarts legacy and [that] it's really good. And I appreciate sharing about yourself, but it's a hot topic as it relates to politics and trans people and JK Rowling. It makes

me think about it more – does he know, or does he not care? Has he considered it? There's so much that goes into every choice we make, but we are aware of things we see – he seems down to not misgender me, but it raises flags.

MW: Do you consider yourself politically engaged? Why or why not? Is this (political engagement) different to you than political involvement? If so, why?

G: I don't know if this comes up with others, but I feel the pressure to not be that person sometimes. I have a pretty cool BLM sign, but I haven't found a place to put it. Trying not to draw too [much] attention to myself, but knowing I already have by being queer and trans. Being in Kansas specifically – what is safe, what's uncomfortable, as a white person there's so much around BLM – how do I make sure I'm being safe but not leaning into my own privilege?

MW: Do you think there is enough political engagement within the LGBTQ+ community?

G: I would say we see the most political direct engagement from people who are most marginalized. When I think about those less involved, I think about cis well-to-do white gay men. And so, you made a charitable donation with your extra money? What are we doing in terms of organizing and political pressure? When I think of organizing, I think of QT+BIPOC siblings. Because they have the least to lose, and because they have the least. If they had more capital, what would that look like? I can't help but think. The fight for gay marriage is a good example of people with a certain view of what the community needs and that being the ability to marry – and then to see a lot of things slow down after that and to know different communities are an afterthought 10 years later – just to think about our own history and the mainstream narrative – when we look at it, it tells a lot of stories.

MW: What about within other marginalized communities? Why or why not?

G: I think in some ways it's the same, we see people with the least doing the most and vice versa – working against the political reformation people are seeking to maintain their status quo – it's hard to say I want people who want the status quo to do more. Sometimes, I want them to take a backseat and let those other people with less to do more.
A formative experience for me as young person was California Prop 8 and it was on the ballot – I was raised LDS and the church put a lot into the election. Everyone around me, and even me, not knowing any better, had a lot of opinions about gay marriage in 2008 and I don't know if they should have. And that's their right, but it really cause a lot of trauma for people around me who were refused the right to marry until the state Supreme Court overturned it. I think it's easier for people outside the queer and trans community to engage in politics because there's less to lose, less vulnerability – things are seen as matter of opinion rather than identity politics and life or death. It kind of is identity politics, but when it's dismissed on those grounds that's hard.

MW: Given your experience as a transgender, gender non-conforming and/or queer person, do you think that current approaches to political engagement and advocacy for marginalized groups are working? Why or why not?

G: I think we need to do way more. So no, they're probably not working as well as they need to be. There's so much splintering that it's hard to feel like there are spaces where people can bring their whole selves. It's not lost on me that the federal government is going to end pandemic emergency, but people with disabilities have never seen this degree of support from able-bodied people. As pandemic fatigue has worn on, it has been easier and easier for people to stop masking and disregard people who can't participate

because it's their life or death. I had a hard time with pride parades during the pandemic – how do you make space for everyone in a meaningful way without saying "well it's gay pride!" Okay, well what about gay people with disabilities? That's my biggest thing. And maybe it's impossible, but how do we make sure everyone's needs get met? There needs to be more of an effort.

MW: If you think current approaches are working, what should social justice advocates continue to do? If you don't think they are working, what can be done differently?

G: I think we need to expand who we're including in the conversation as far as other folks who are marginalized. I also think there are – for example, I was raised LDS, and for the last year, I was going back to church – it's that fascinating thing, I'm too queer and trans to be an active member of the church, but I'm too Christian to be a full member of the queer and trans community. It makes sense about how these divisions have formed. There's a lot of people with religious, physical, mental trauma – maybe when queer people have more of a right to exist, we can come around to being more whole. It's a kind of chicken and an egg thing. As long as people view this as a "queer and trans" topic and not a people topic, we are going to continue having these issues.

Visibility isn't always a good thing – the visibility we need is as whole people, who are as diverse as every other person. I don't know where that starts, but once the political momentum shifts, we will start to see things take off pretty quickly. But right now it's just a fight. That's the narrative in the media, in the ballot, and so it's hard to separate and say "no, this isn't up for debate" and how we can be good humans for each other.