Transgenders Today

Ziwei Cheng

University of Colorado at Boulder

Introduction

Recently, the administration of Donald Trump adopted an explicit definition of gender as determined on a biological basis and ‘transgender’ could be defined out of existence under Trump administration (Green, Benner, Pear, 2018). Such acts of the president surely symbol the back stepping of transgender rights and further trouble the transgender population. Overall, transgender population experience significantly more health and social issues than the general public. According to statistics, 41% of trans people have attempted suicide, 50% have been raped or assaulted, and 80% of trans students feel unsafe in school (Pan, n.d.). The purpose of this paper is to learn about transgender population’s challenges from childhood to college because it is essential to investigate why transgender population have a significantly higher rate of depression and what can gender-conforming population do to support transgenders.

The first topic in the article is the challenges transgender teenagers face in relation with their families, school and health. Trans teenagers may risk losing support from their families when they come out, be ridiculed in school by their peers and bear potential health risks when they choose to inject hormones or undergo surgery. Also, most health insurances do not cover the expense of transgender surgery or hormone injections and it could expose transgender population to financial crisis. Second, the essay will link transgender struggles with college lives. Inadequate social accommodations of gender-neutral bathrooms, gender pronouns and dorm arrangement in colleges could contribute to transgender population’s difficulties on campus. Overall, the topics of transgender struggles can fit into the protests and histories of homosexual and gender equity and the changes in humane identities. The essay intends to comprehend what actions are currently being taken to assist transgender population by doing research in CU Boulder’s housing accommodations for transgender students, gender-neutral bathrooms on campus and stated discrimination policies and what further actions can people take to assist the transgender population by asking transgender support group members for opinions.

Background

My article focuses on the significant higher depression rate among the transgender population, invests in the struggles transgender population face from childhood to college life that result in the depression and what actions are being taken to assist them. First, in the article "Understanding the transgender community" (Understand the transgender community, n.d.), the author discusses the definition of being a transgender and the increased visibility of the transgender community. Second, the author briefly states the possible challenges transgender people may encounter in the society such as the lack of legal protection, anti-transgender violence, poverty and so on. Although such topics are too broad for my research in transgender difficulties in childhood and colleges, the article provides me with useful background information about the transgender community and helps me identify possible topics in my paper such as peer harassment, health care barriers, and homelessness among transgender population. Then, in the transcript of the documentary " Growing up trans" (Navasky & Connor, 2015), the producers illustrate the lives of transgender children and teenagers along with their interaction with schools and families. The documentary describes the fear of transgender teenagers when they have to go through their biological sex's puberty. Even though it is possible to prevent puberty through hormone blockers, the medication can be health-concerning because it is a field with too little research to predict any long-term side effects such as cancer. Also, hormone injections’ consequences such as voice change cannot be revoked even when the child intends to stop and be his/her biological sex one day. This documentary equipped me with vivid examples of trans teenagers' difficulties in everyday lives and specifies the broad problems such as health insurance for the transgender population with authentic examples. In respect of transgender college students' difficulties, my article will concentrate on two social accommodations on campus: gender-neutral bathrooms and dorm arrangements. In Oklahoma University, its Housing Policy reveals that housing is assigned by birth gender unless the student has already completed a sexual reassignment surgery (Albertson, 2016). Also, researchers found that housing professionals may marginalize transgender students to concentrate on the majority of gender-conforming students when enacting housing policies (Pryer et al., 2016). A plausible solution to improve transgender students’ happiness in colleges is to provide housing staff with more training and knowledge about transgender students when they arrange dorms. These researchers give me the framework to connect their work with my research into CU Boulder's housing arrangements for transgender students, how the university's actions result in transgender students' happiness rate and what suggestions can be made to the university to modify its policies. Other than dorm arrangements, transgender bathroom rights is also in a hot debate. In a high school in Missouri state, more than 100 students staged a protest when one of their transgender female classmates was allowed to use the female bathroom (Workman, 2015). In the essay "North Caroline repeals 'bathroom law'"(Park et al., 2017), the author reports the end of tumult when North Carolina state withdrew the Housing Bill 2 that "required that people at a government-run facility must use bathrooms and locker rooms that correspond to the gender on their birth certificate" earlier last year (Park et al., 2017). These essays motivate me to collect data about the gender-neutral bathrooms on campus and analyze what bathroom rights mean to transgender students.

Method

To investigate the transgender population's overall happiness in CU and the school's policies to support them, I intend to contact the Gender and Sexuality Center that offers support for the LGBTQ community and ask them a few questions by email. Professor Feldman provided me with several email addresses of the staff in the Gender an Sexuality Center and I included the questions listed below in my email interview with the center’s trans specialist:

1, What are the dorm arrangements of CU that accommodate the transgender students?

2, What are the main problems transgender college students face on campus?

3, What suggestions can be made to gender-conforming students on how to properly interact with transgender students?

From these questions, possible virtues and flaws of CU's actions to support transgender population can be identified, further suggestions could be made to improve campus atmosphere for transgender students and instructions for gender-conforming students on how to interact with transgender students can be stated. I believe such an interview of experienced staff of LGBTQ department is more appropriate than to survey other students. The reason is that transgender students may not feel comfortable to fill out surveys about their depression and gender-conforming students may not be familiar with transgender students' issues to provide useful information. Based on the staff's response, I will link their opinions with my prior research to address the following questions:

1. How are CU's resources for transgender students different from other schools in the US and how effective are they?

2. What are the differences between transgender teenagers' struggles and transgender college students' problems; do the issues improve or get worse over their lifetime?

3. What are the simple steps gender-conforming population can do to support the transgender community?

Analysis

After sending out the email, I received a response from the trans specialist in CU's center for inclusion and social change. His answer is concluded below:

Q1: What are the dorm arrangements of CU that accommodate the transgender students?

R: Trans students can live in any dorm with any gender they choose, Hallett hall has gender-inclusive housing on a floor called spectrum which is a dedicated LGBTQ and ally space, and Will Vill East will have a portion of a floor devoted to gender inclusive space, and the entire building will have gender inclusive restrooms/shower facilities further next year.

Q2: what are the main problems transgender college students face on campus?

R: Most of their challenges come from poor interactions with other students, and trans students do not feel as welcomed, supported, or valued as cisgender students. Finding acceptance in classrooms through professors asking about pronouns, trans issues in conversations and finding a supportive community can also feel very challenging.

Q3: what suggestions can be made to gender-conforming students on how to properly interact with transgender students?

R: The best thing cisgender students could do is educating themselves on why pronouns are important, remember to use the proper pronouns, learn about what issues trans people face in their lives due to systems of oppression and bring those issues up in classrooms. Being an ally and speaking up for trans people takes much pressure off of trans students and makes them feel more included on campus.

In general, CU's resources stand out in ways that the policy is more tolerant and community support is more available. In New York, the NYC Department of Buildings required all large new buildings to install sex-segregated facilities. When NYU submitted a petition for an exemption of gender-neutral bathrooms in their renovated building, the department rejected them because of "concerns about security and liability"(Wade & Ferree, 2015). In CU, even though the gender-neutral bathrooms are not in majority, they spread out in many places on campus, and the idea of having an entire building with gender inclusive restrooms/shower facilities in a distant future is definitely innovative. Such acts indicate that the school trusts and supports the transgender students and do not use "safety issues" as excuses to deny transgender students' on-campus resources. However, CU could improve in training for staff and students about the LGBTQ community because sometimes professors assume pronouns in classes to avoid costing time in asking about pronouns and many students do not take preferred pronouns, names or identities of others seriously.

Also, the trans specialist stated that "the challenges transgender population face depend on their identity development and social support they receive." When transgender teenagers lose family support as a youth, meeting basic needs to survive is the priority. When they do receive financial and emotional support from families, the social pressure from peers and oppression from social systems become the primary source of their stress. For transgender college students, their issues sometimes are more complicated because they are in transition from school to society. Grown-up trans can make salaries and live in independence, but the structure in society is often based on the gender binary (the classification of sex and gender into two distinct, opposite and disconnected forms of masculine and feminine) and their identities are often marginalized ignored or in gendered institutions.

Conclusion

For the gender-conforming population, the responsibility to accept transgender population's identity, acknowledge their importance in a social context and support them with action should be embraced and shared. First, as shown that 40% of the homeless youth served by agencies identify as LGBT (Durso & Gates, 2012), it is crucial for government legislature and organizations to address the problem of homelessness among transgender youth. Also, more hospitals and insurance can include medical resources, mental guidance and financial coverage for transgenders and their families. Secondly, gender-conforming people should not only ask about pronouns when they interact with others, but also educate themselves on why the pronouns are essential. People often assume pronouns and sexuality because they are used to the ideology that everyone's gender identity corresponds with the biological sex. When we start reevaluating such idea and make changes in progress, the significance of pronouns would be more visible and transgender population would stop existing as a social minority. Thirdly, changes do not happen overnight, and when bullying, ridicules, and assaults keep happening to transgender population, we should all take it seriously and step up to be an ally. When students discriminate transgenders because of their identities, the others witnessing such phenomenon should not sweep it under the rug but speak up. The courage to address others wrong-doing and be in a united front with transgenders would not only stop the bullying from recurring but also take some pressure off transgenders’ shoulders. Whether it's a simple question about pronouns in conversation, a courageous confrontation when transgenders are being discriminated, or a more complicated legislature that bring structural change in society, differences are being accumulated. As long as we understand that trans people deserve happiness and rights like everybody does, a more embracing society will be rising.

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