The Transgender Experience Impact on Secondary School Choice: A Case Study

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# Abstract

Transgender is a term used to describe someone who has a gender expression or identity that is different than what was assigned at birth (Kirk & Kulkarni, 2006).  High rates of depression and self-harm along with low rates of school attendance and educational achievement are common in transgender youth (Kosciw, 2009).  The experiences of transgender students and their families are virtually invisible in educational literature (Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010).  Because transgender issues are often grouped with lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations, there are limited studies that focus solely on transgender youth in education (Irwin, 2002).  The aim of this study was to: (a) explore the relationship between the transgender experience and secondary school choice, and (b) understand the supports that schools have for transgender students and their families to reach the student’s learning potential.  This study shared the individual experiences of parents of a transgender child who has entered into secondary school as a transgender female.  Using a qualitative case study, open-ended questions for the participants provided an insider look into their transgender family experience and the resulting effect on school choice.  The results of this study indicated that a safe school culture established by an alternative magnet school and the unconditional love and support from the parents provided an environment in which the transgender child could thrive.  Many opportunities for future research emerged such as correlating student discipline with transgender acceptance and determining the extent to which teacher education programs provide cultural sensitivity of transgender issues.

*Keywords:*transgender, education, school choice, school environment, secondary school

**Table of Contents**

Chapter 1: Definition of the Problem…………………………………………

Introduction…………………………………………………………………………………

Contextualizing Background………………………………………………………………

Need for Research………………………………………………………………

Statement of the Research Question…………………………………………

Definition of Terms………………………………………………………………

Preview of Literature…………………………………………

Preview of Methodology…………………………………………

Significance of Study…………………………………………

Limitations……………………………………………………………

Summary……………………………………………………………

Chapter 2: Literature Review………………………………………………………………

Parental School Choice Factors……………………………………………………………

Public Awareness………………………………………………………………

Educational Law………………………………………………………………

Cultural Gender Stereotypes………………………………………………………………

Negative reactions to homosexuality…………………………………………

Community rejection and support…………………………………………

Separating the “T” from LGBT…………………………………………

A focus on transgender…………………………………………

LGBT Youth in School………………………………………………………………

Safety in the school environment…………………………………………

School victimization…………………………………………

Consequences of victimization…………………….……

Negative school environments for LGBT students……………………

Homophobia in schools…………………………………………

LGBT school victimization………………………………………

LGBT experiences by school staff……………………

LGBT school outcomes………………………………………

Positive school environment for LGBT students……………………

Teacher interactions………………………………………

Gay Straight Alliance…………………………………………

Limited research in regards to transgender……………………

Difficulty with transgender identity……………………

Negative experiences of transgender students……………………

Negative affects of transgender abuse……………………

Positive transgender experiences with GSA……………………

Transgender Youth Alternatives to Traditional Schools……………………

Summary………………………………………………………………

Chapter 3: Methodology……………………………………………………………………………

Research Design Overview……………………………………………………………

Setting/Participants………………………………………………………………

Instruments/Measures………………………………………………………………

Procedures………………………………………………………………

Data Processing/Analysis………………………………………………………………

Ethical Considerations/Limitations…………………………………………

Summary……………………………………………………………………………………

Chapter 4: Results…………………………………………………………………………

Introduction……………………………………………………………

Family Demographics……………………………………………………………

Parker………………………………………………………………………

Amber……………………………………………………………

Data Analysis

Themes……………………………………………………………

Transgender Experience………………………………………

Gender roles…………………………………………………

Prejudice……………………………………………………………

Ignorance…………………………………………………

Rejection…………………………………………………

Identity recognition…………………………… ……………………

Shame…………………………… ……………………

Concealment………………………………………

Isolation………………………………………

Depression………………………………………

Coming out…………………………………………………

Confidence……………………………………………………………

School Choice Factors…………………………………………………

Reputation……………………………………………………………………

Safety……………………………………………………………………

Fear…………………………………………………

Protection………………………………………

Trust…………………………………………………

School size…………………………………………………

School Choice Impact…………………………………………………

Environment…………………………………………………

Physical…………………………………………………

Cultural…………………………………………………

Proactive school…………………………………………………………

Relationships……………………………………………………………………

Academic success…………………………………………………………

Cultural Shifts……………………………………………………………………

School staff……………………………………………………………………

Students……………………………………………………………………

Parents……………………………………………………………………

Community…………………………………………………………

Summary……………………………………………………………………

Chapter 5: Discussion…………………………………………………………………………

Introduction………………………………………………………

Experiences Verified by the Literature……………………………………

Experiences Not Verified by the Literature……………………………………

Implications………………………………………………………

Limitations………………………………………………………

Future Research………………………………………………………

Conclusion………………………………………………………

References……………………………………………………………………………………

Appendix A: Consent Form………………………………………………………………

Appendix B: Interview Questions………………………………………………………………

# Chapter 1: Definition of the Problem

## Introduction

When given an option to choose schools, families have a variety of factors to provide their child with the best education available (Hausman & Goldring, 2000). School choice becomes even more complex when a family has a child who is transsexual. Because society has created a culture of stereotyped gender roles, transgender youth may have difficulty with adhering to these cultural norms (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006). The struggle of gender identity that transgender youth face has resulted in lower levels of academic success when compared to their non-transgendered peers (Rosenberg, 2002; Kosciw, 2009). This study seeks to identify the specific cultural risks that transgender students face and use these factors as clues to determine potential hopes and fears parents may have when enrolling a self-identified transgender student in secondary education. Open-ended interviews of the parents of a transgender child will offer insights to the reasons for school choice.

## Contextualizing Background

        A transgender person is one who identifies as a gender opposite to that of which they were physically born (“Peer Violence and Bullying,” 2011). When someone does not conform to a specific environment, it may result in lower levels of self-esteem and confidence due to a feeling of not belonging (Yeung & Martin, 2003). Because a transgender person may not fit into society’s cultural norms, he or she may be devalued by his or her peers through bullying (Hazler, 1996). The first instance of victimization that transgender students may experience is likely to happen in school (D’Augelli, Grossman, & Straks, 2006). The harassment that occurs in schools can cause increased depression brought by isolation and loneliness. Transgender individuals experience a mix of obstacles that affect their mental health and wellness (Rotondi, Bauer, Travers, Travers, Scanlon, & Kaay, 2011).

The acceptance of transgender students in schools has created mixed headlines in the news.  In California, a transgender female student was recipient of the homecoming queen crown (Streeter, 2013). Alternatively, in Pennsylvania, a transgender male was denied access to the homecoming ballot by the school’s administration and the district’s school board (Lattanzio, 2013).

        To protect these students, California lawmakers approved AB 1266, Pupil Rights: Sex-Segregated School Programs and Activities.  This assembly bill requires public K-12 schools in California to provide transgender students with access to restrooms and the ability to join school sports teams of their identified gender (“Pupil Rights,” 2013).  Due to its recent application, schools and districts may be at various levels of implementation of AB1266.  In negative reaction to the signing of AB 1266, Republican California State Assemblyman Donnelly expressed his opinion to pull his children out of public schools for safety and fear against transgender students (Donnelly, 2013).

## Need for Research

This study moves beyond other studies in that it seeks to isolate transgender students from the larger lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) group, and hone in on the transgender experience relative to school choice. Because transgender students are often lumped together with lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals, it is difficult to resolve the transgender students’ experience (Irwin, 2002). Transgender people often share similarities between LGB people because of the shared experiences of hate, victimization, and bullying. While they share some of these common experiences, issues that are specific to transgender students are missing in educational research (Rands, 2009). The relationships that transgender adolescents have with their family are absent in the literature as well (Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010). There is no research regarding the factors that a family with a transgender student will use to determine school choice.

## Statement of the Research Question

The cultural non-acceptance of transgender identity by peers may present itself with problems for a transgender young adult, such as experiencing victimization or bullying.  The bullying can lead transgender youth to depression, suicide attempts, and suicide (Budge, Adelson, & Howard, 2013).  While there is general research about the effects of bullying or rejection by peers, it rarely focuses on daily life or other issues that impact transgender students.  There is a deficiency of understanding about the individual experience of a transgender student, their family, and its relationship to school choice.  Furthermore, the research is often found in psychology journals and rarely reflects the educator’s perspective. If the negative experiences that a transgender student faces are detrimental to their success, then there is a need to provide those students and families with the choice for a school environment that will help to mitigate those risks. The study will aim to answer two questions from the perspective of transgender parents: (a) In what ways does a transgender student family’s experience impact secondary school choice? And, (b) What support and support systems do secondary educational institutions provide to give transgender students and their families the best opportunity for educational achievement?

## Definition of Terms

Sexual orientation refers to the attraction or desire towards men, women, or both sexes. It is usually defined as homosexual/gay/lesbian (attraction towards the same gender), heterosexual (attraction towards opposite gender), or bisexual (attraction towards both men and women) (American Psychological Association, 2008). Gender identity refers to the internal identification of being male, female, or something else (American Psychological Association [APA], 2011). Transgender is a term that is used to describe those who have gender identity, expression, or behavior that differs from their assigned biological sex at birth (Feinberg, 1992; Kirk & Kulkarni, 2006). Another way to describe transgender individuals is: people who do not conform to the gender identities that have been culturally accepted over time (Ryan & Futterman, 1997). Used as a noun, a transsexual refers to a transgender person who lives or desires to live as members of the sex other than their sex assigned at birth (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). While not every transgender person will fit into these two categories, a transgender person who was born male and identifies as female (MTF) is referred to as a transgender female and a transgender person who was born female and identifies as male (FTM) is referred to as a transgender male. A person who does not conform to any particular gender identity is known as gender non-conforming (Greytak, Kosciw, & Boesen, 2013). A distinction must be made between the term transgender and homosexual in that sexuality and gender identity are not the same. Sexual orientation refers to the level of attraction that one may have towards a particular gender or multiple genders, whereas gender identity refers to internal sense of being a man, woman, or something else. For example, a transgender female (who was born a male) that is attracted to females would be recognized as a lesbian; a transgender male (who was born a female) that is attracted to females would be considered a heterosexual (APA, 2011). Durso & Gates (2012) define LGBT as, “an acronym used to refer to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community or someone who identifies as a member of that community” (p. 15).

## Preview of Literature

The existing breadth of transgender specific literature in education and the relationship between transgender student experience and choice of school is limited. This is due to the fact that transgender issues are often lumped in a broad category that comprises all gender and sexual minorities within the acronym LGBT (Irwin, 2002). The review of the literature in this study focuses on: parental school choice factors, public awareness of transgender people in the media, educational law that protects transgender youth, cultural stereotypes of gender, issues of LGBT youth in school, and alternatives to traditional schools for transgender youth. The intent of the literature is to tease out transgender specific experiences in LGBT youth to determine the factors that will provide transgender students and their families with informed decisions in school choice for transgender students.

## Preview of Methodology

A qualitative case study of parents with a transgender child is used to gather data on the transgender family experience and its effect on choice of school. The parents of a transgender child will consent to answer open-ended questions on their experience. The parent interviews will then be transcribed in order to develop common themes in relationship to their experience and school choice for their transgender child. The themes developed will be compared to the existing literature.

## Significance of Study

Transgender students run a high risk of harassment and bullying by their peers (Grant, Mottet, Tanis, Harrison, Herman, & Keisling, 2011). Because of this, transgender youth are at greater risk of depression and lower educational attainment (Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2006). It is essential that parents, teachers, school administrators, and other adult school staff are aware of the new laws in California, as well as signs of isolation, in order to provide transgender youth with a chance for academic success that is equal to that of their peers. The research also intends to inform families of transgender children with possible key factors that will support a school environment in which their transgender child will succeed.

## Limitations

This study is limited to the perspective of only one transgender family. The experiences of this family may not be commonly shared amongst the population of transgender families. The study will also only include the perceptions of the transgender experience from a parent point of view. It is possible that the parents may have a misrepresented view of their experiences with their transgender child or the schools that are within the area. Even though transgender people make up a small portion of the population (0.3%) it is important to provide this information to educational leaders and schools as society becomes more aware of transgender issues (Gates, 2011).

## Summary

This study aims to answer in what ways does a transgender family’s experience impact school choice and what supports do schools provide for transgender students and their families? The literature review will provide prior research that relates to school choice and transgender experience. A qualitative case study of parents of a transgender child will give insight to their experience. The results of this study will provide educational leaders, teachers, students, and families with relevant information that may help to inform school choice and improve the support that schools offer to transgender students and their families. Chapter two will include the existing literature with regards to school choice and transgender youth experience.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

The review of the literature will begin with factors that parents may use when choosing a school. A brief history of the movement towards increased attention of transgender people in society will be discussed to provide context for the recent laws that have been implemented to protect the rights of transgender youth in primary and secondary education. To understand why these laws are in place, one must delve into the gender stereotypes and gender roles that have been infused in our cultural environment. The gender biases formed within family systems and on school playgrounds can be negatively reinforced in schools. When school aged individuals do not fit into the standardized cultural norms, they may become ostracized and ridiculed by their peers. The complexity of gender is further increased when sexuality, the level of attraction one has to a particular gender, is introduced. The societal non-conforming commonality between LGBT groupings causes them to often be clustered together. After all, their experiences of victimization, harassment, and bullying are frequently shared occurrences in schools. But, the experience that transgender youth face is usually more severe because the conflict of identity is not towards the attraction towards another but within the container that houses their mind. This can often lead a transgender child to have inner turmoil that can be difficult to be resolved. While supportive programs and adults in schools can help to provide a healthy environment for LGBT students, there is miniscule research that focuses exclusively on the positive and negative experiences transgender youth have in school. Thus, the T in LGBT must be isolated in order to understand the specific school experiences that transgender youth face. Because traditional school settings may not provide transgender students with a safe environment, alternative and non-traditional school settings are also explored.

## Parental School Choice Factors

When faced with school choice, parents choose schools for a variety of different reasons that can include: location, children’s friends, and curriculum (Betebenner, 2005). Other parents have evaluated school choice based on reputation, facility maintenance, and teacher competence (Gonrard, 1997). Some educated parents valued diversity and values of teaching as the most important factors in school choice; other parents focused on their child’s safety (Schneider, Marschall, Teske, & Rock, 1998; Schneider, Marschall, & Teske, 2000).

Those who support school choice believe that the connection between student and school can lead to greater academic success (Chubb & More, 1990; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Doyle, 1989; Driscoll, 1993; Levin, 1991; Natahan, 1987; Raywid, 1987). Academics are typically the main priority for a parent when a child is changing schools (Armour & Preiser, 1998; Kleitz, Weiher, Tedin, & Matland, 2000). While some parents may learn about the school through talking with other parents (Boyer, 1992; Wilson, 1992; Witte, 1996), other parents find that School Accountability Report Cards allow them to publically view the pertinent information to choose a school that will benefit their child (Betebenner, 2005). Research in school choice has shown that parent satisfaction is increased if the parent was able to choose their child’s school when compared to families whose school was assigned (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1992; Witte, 1996; Martinez, Godwin, & Kemerer, 1996). Parents select a variety of reasons when given the opportunity to pick a school (Hausman & Goldring, 2000).

## Public Awareness

Before the 1980s, mental health professionals classified individuals who wanted to be a different gender than was assigned to them at birth as psychotic or acutely disturbed (Minter, 2012). The tolerance of LGBT rights has increased considerably in Western societies over the past few decades (Andersen & Fetner, 2008; Gibson, 2007; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Loftus, 2001; Minter, 2012; Newman, 2007). Transgender roles have become more present in cinema and television through Hilary Swank’s portrayal of the true-life murder of female to male (FTM) Brandon Teena in *Boys Don’t Cry* (Pierce, Kolodner, & Vachron, 1999) and Canadian actress Jordan Todosey’s portrayal of a fictional FTM transgender character Adam Torres in *Degrassi* (Jancelewicz, 2011). Recently, Jared Leto won a plethora of awards and achievements for playing transgender HIV-positive female Rayon in *Dallas Buyers Club* (Wang, 2014). As the public’s mindsets shift from seeing gender identity as a psychotic disorder to a common occurrence in society, the attitudes must be altered in schools as well (Cusick, 1983). There are mixed reactions from schools when allowing students to participate in activities such as homecoming dances. In California, a transgender female was crowned homecoming queen (Streeter, 2013) while a transgender male was not allowed to participate in his school’s homecoming (Lattanzio, 2013). Even though societies throughout the world have adopted equal LGBT rights legislation, they continue to have negative attitudes towards LGBT issues (Hooghe, Claes, Harell, Quintelier, & Dejaeghere, 2010).

## Educational Law

The equal treatment of all students is mandated through the Fourteenth Amendment. This requires that a school must protect its students equally from harassment, discrimination and violence (Campos, 2005; Mallory, 1997). *No Child Left Behind* requires that schools ensure a safe learning environment for all students even though those identities may be in disagreement with personal religious beliefs (“No Child Left Behind,” 2002). In regards to LGBT people, there have been recent advances in the protection of their rights (Bamforth, 2005). California AB 1266 states that “a pupil shall be permitted to participate in sex-segregated school programs and activities, including athletic teams and competitions, and use facilities consistent with his or her gender identity, irrespective of the gender listed on the pupil’s records” (“Pupil Rights,” 2013, p. \_\_\_). In *Student v. Arcadia Unified School District*, Arcadia Unified School District, a school district in California, was required to “revise their policies to include gender based discrimination that is inclusive of a student’s gender identity, gender expression, gender transition, transgender status, or gender nonconformity” (2013, p. 4)

## Cultural Gender Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes can be engrained in Western culture in early stages of life (Poulin-Dubois, Serbin, Eichstedt, Sen, & Beissel, 2002). Kessels (2005) defines gender stereotypes as “a set of specific beliefs about the characteristics that women and men are likely to possess” (p. 310). The stereotypes of gender are thus integrated amongst our youth. Because of cultural norms, youth in society are expected to adopt cultural values that are associated with their assigned gender at birth. If those roles are not followed, the results are often negative (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006). Krobobov (2004) found that students in ninth and tenth grades tend to be less accepting of LGBT peers than older students because they may be fearful of associating with behaviors that do not adhere to social norms. Because of this, boys may distance themselves from social experiences that might be identified to have homosexual connotations.

Negative reactions to homosexuality. Individuals who are fearful towards non-heterosexual values experience homophobia. Homophobia involves negative attitudes and views towards those who do not conform to heterosexuality (Wright, Adams, & Bernat, 1999) and can result in physical and verbal harassment (Poteat & Espelage, 2005). Youth who do not conform to society’s heterosexual values become a greater risk to victimization (Meyer, 2003; Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005). In general, males tend to have more negative reactions regarding homosexuality, while females are more accepting (Ellis, Kitzinger, & Wilkinson, 2002; Gelbal & Duyan, 2006; Lambert, Ventura, Hall & Cluse-Tolar, 2006; Raja & Stokes, 1998).

Community rejection and support.When coming out, some students reported to have feelings of guilt and shame about who they are and their sexuality (Buchanan, Dzelme, Harris, & Hecker, 2001; D’Augelli, 1994). Severe stress can occur from the rejection and internalized shame that sexual minorities may experience (Meyer, 2003). Many had to lie and keep their identify hidden throughout their adolescent years. Conservative and religious groups can also have a negative impact on how LGBT rights are accepted within the community (Newman, 2002; Olson, Cadge, & Harrison, 2006) and are more likely to exhibit homophobic sentiment (Schulte & Battle, 2004; Schawartz & Lindley, 2005). While Protestant churches show the lowest acceptance of LGBT rights (Gay & Ellison, 1993), liberal Jewish temples show a strong support for LGBT rights (Crockett & Voas, 2003). In addition, Latino, immigrant, religious, and low-socioeconomic status families were less accepting of LGBT youth (Riley, Sitharthan, Clemson, & Diamond, 2011). As of 2012, about 40% of homeless youth identified as being LGBT; mostly due to rejection by their parents and families (Durso & Gates, 2012).

Separating the “T” from LGBT.The letter "T" in LGBT refers to the gender identity "transgendered," or "an individual whose physical or genetic sex (male or female) does not correspond with their gender identity as a man, woman, or somewhere in between" (Macgillivray, 2004, p. 11). Many articles that involve transgender students in education are difficult to be isolated to transgender people because they are often mixed within the context of LGBT groupings and rarely studied on their own (Irwin, 2002). Additionally, most LGBT studies have very few transgender participants and focus more on LGB populations (Ryan & Rivers, 2003). Transgender people also face far more discrimination and less recognition than LGB communities; the policies in the past that have been designed to protect LGB groups have done little to provide safety for gender identity or expression (Bockting, Robinson, & Rosser, 1998).

A focus on transgender.Since transgender individuals are often lumped into the same category as people who are LGB, it is important to give specific explanations about who transgender people are. Israel (2005) said that gender identity refers to the “maleness and femaleness a person feels on the inside; how that identity is projected to the world; and how others mirror that identity back to the individual” (p. 55). Grossman & D’Augelli (2006) stated that **"**transgender youth are invisible in most Western cultures because social structures assume a binary classification of gender. Individuals are expected to assume the gender of their biological sex as well as the gender expectations and roles associated with it" (p. 112). The invisibility of transgender youth can also be seen in the deficiency of literature that pertains to them and their families. Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez (2010) stated that “literature addressing the family relationships for transgender adolescents and young people is miniscule” (p. 205).

## LGBT Youth in School

In order to understand the transgender experience in schools, general LGBT youth experiences in school must be explored. While the gender identity experience that transgender students face may be similar to the sexual identity experiences of LGB students, their journey can have noticeable differences. Because of this, the safety of the school environment and negative and positive school experiences of LGBT will first be investigated to then understand the specific experience of transgender students in schools.

Safety in the school environment.Maslow’s hierarchy of needs states that safety and security are essential human needs, second only to the physiological needs of food, water, and shelter (1943). The need for safety for students can be realized through a school’s environment. School climate can be characterized by a learning environment that includes the level of safety and belonging that students experience in school from their teachers (Steinberg, 2002; Kosciw, Greytak, & Diaz 2009). A child spends most of their early years before adulthood in school, which is a fundamental period for development and growth. The environment of the school is critical because it can predict the next 20 years of life for adolescents (Russell & McGuire, 2008).

School victimization.Victimization is defined as having a systematic abuse of power that, through repeated and deliberate occurrences, is harmful to another (Smith & Sharp, 1994). This has a detrimental impact to the mental health of an individual. By devaluing another person, the bully seeks to establish a psychological dominance over their victim (Hazler, 1996).

Consequences of victimization. Bullying can inflict physical or emotional pain through lowering the victim’s self-esteem and confidence (Hazler, 1996). Adolescents who are involved with bullying are at higher risk for depression and suicide (Klomek, Marrocco, Kleinman, Schonfeld, & Gould, 2007). Without a strong connection to the school environment and social support, students can experience social-cognitive deficits, destructive sense of self, social intolerance, isolation, feelings of rejection, and hopelessness (Gapka & Raj, 2003; Pearson, 2007). When faced with an environment that is not accepting of their identity, students may develop harmful coping mechanisms. Some students may alter their appearance and lower their self-image and self-esteem (Yeung & Martin, 2003). To temporarily relieve the pain, teenagers may resort to alcohol or drugs to numb the pain of isolation or may skip school altogether (Merton, 1957).

Negative school environments for LGBT students.The emotional strain of the school environment negatively impacts LGBT students. LGBT students were found to be three to five times more likely to not attend school than their non-LGBT counterparts because of concerns of safety (Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2010; O’Shaughnessy, Russell, Heck, Calhoun, & Laub, 2004; GLSEN, 2006; Garofalo, Wolf, Kessel, Palfrey, & DuRant, 1998). Safety becomes the number one issue for LGB students because “the American high school remains one of the most homophobic and change-resistant institutions in the United States” (Owens, 1998, p. xi). As a sexual minority, many LGB students will often prioritize safety over academic success (Bailey, 2003; Weiler, 2003). A study by Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz (2009) concluded that 69% of students felt unsafe at school because of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Homophobia in schools.Homophobia is often the cause of victimization towards LGBT groups (Wright, Adams, & Bernat, 1999).Homophobia can cause LGBT high school students to endure higher levels of harassment when compared to their heterosexual peers. This can potentially damage these students physically, emotionally, and educationally (Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network [GLSEN], 2006). The teasing, threats, harassment, and assaults that LGBT students frequently experience can be a direct result of homophobia (Pilkington & D’Augelli, 1995).

***LGBT*** school victimization.LGBT adolescents report high levels of physical and verbal victimization from peers in schools (Human Rights Watch, 2001; Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2010). Because of the questioning of their sexuality, LGBT students can experience substantial levels of assault that can lead to physical and psychological distress and fear of safety (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006, D’Augelli, Pilkington, & Hershberger, 2002; D’Augelli et al., 2006; Russell, Franz, & Driscoll, 2001a; Russell et al., 2001b).

LGBT experiences by school staff.Schools may not provide a space for healthy development for LGBT youth because schools and teachers often reinforce heterosexual roles (Pearson, 2007). LGBT students have admitted hearing 25-31% of teachers or other school staff say discriminatory remarks about LGBT people (Adelman & Woods, 2006; McGuire et al., 2010; Grant et al., 2011). Because teachers, administrators, and other school staff may have not grown up in a time when LGBT issues were as prevalent, they may lack the experience and/or knowledge to handle concerns that may arise with LGBT students. This can indirectly perpetuate the homophobia and heterosexism that is common in most schools (Jordan, Vaughan & Woodworth, 1997; Lipkin, 1999; Lugg, 2003; Munoz-Plaza, Quinn & Rounds, 2002). Teachers also lack the training necessary to give specific support to LGBT youth (Clarke, 2012; Kosciw, 2010; Porreca, 2010).

When student participants were asked who in the school was most supportive of their gender identity, none of them mentioned their principal and, in fact, mentioned the principal as being the most non-supportive person at their school (Jordan, Vaughan & Woodworth, 1997). Teachers can indirectly impact transgender students through the delivery of material while not being aware of the diversity of their students. The assumptions and perceptions that teachers have of their students may also contribute positively or negatively to the school environment and student relationships (Talbert-Johnson, 2006). Kosciw’s study with the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) revealed that nearly two-thirds of students would not report bullying because they believed that nothing would done about the situation (2010).

LGBT school outcomes.Data has shown that LGBT youth are negatively impacted in their academic performance because of victimization experienced in the school environment. It was found that almost twice as many LGBT students did not plan to finish high school or pursue higher education as compared to that of general students. An isolating environment reduces educational ambitions, which in turn, may reduce the opportunities to develop professionally after school (Kosciw et al., 2009). Some students would transfer schools, drop out, or avoid school in order to end episodes of victimization (Russell et al., 2001a, 2001b). When students leave school because of harassment, 48% have reported to experience homelessness (Grant et al., 2011).

Positive school environment for LGBT students.While there are many articles depicting the negative experiences that LGBT youth endure there is still a ray of hope for these students.When individual adolescents have similar attitudes, goals, and competence, friendships can be maintained (Smollar & Youniss, 1982). These social connections and support can help to sustain academic success of LGBT students (Clarke, 2012). Poteat (2008) found that eleventh and twelfth graders were more supportive of LGBT youth than their younger peers probably due to the fact that sexual minorities come out to their peers at older ages. This may give heterosexual youth time to adjust their previous attitudes towards their LGBT peers (Poteat, 2008).

Teacher interactions.A critical aspect of the school environment is the perceptions that students have of teachers and the quality of student to teacher communication (Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006). Teacher support perceived by LGBT students is critical towards positive school experiences (Certo, Cauley, & Chafin, 2003; Karp, 1988). When LGBT students have positive relationships with their teachers they are less likely to experience trouble in school. This helps to promote social and academic success (Russell, Seif, & Truong, 2001). A genuine display of care by the teacher reduces the risk of suicide in LGBT youth (Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006; Goodenow et al., 2006). This is crucial because sexual minority students have limited sources of adult support throughout their lives (Telljohann & Price, 1993).

Gay Straight Alliance.While there often is a lack of information of positive LGBT youth experiences in schools (Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, Card, & Russell, 2010), LGBT students have been given an opportunity for a safe space at school through participation in a student organization called Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) (Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westheimer, 2006; Human Rights Watch, 2001; O’Shaughnessy et al., 2004).Within recent years, the number of GSAs has considerably increased to 4,000 registered groups in the United States (Kosciw et al., 2010). GSAs give students the opportunity to increase their comfort in one’s gender identity (Lee, 2002) and individual empowerment (Russell et al., 2009). This can lead to greater academic achievement and personal relationships of LGBT youth (Lee, 2002; Mayberry, 2006).

GSAs have been reported to improve school safety and increase well-being in LGBT youth (Goodenow et al., 2006; Lee, 2002; Kosciw et al., 2010; O’Shaughnessy et al., 2004; Walls, Freedenthal & Wisneski, 2008; Walls, Kane, & Wineski, 2010). GSAs can also help to create a positive school environment for LGBT and non-LGBT students (Clarke, 2012; O’Shaughnessy, 2004; Russell et al., 2009) and can also lower instances of victimization (Clarke, 2012; Kosciw, 2010). Schools with safer campus climates had GSAs, implemented anti-bullying policies, and provided training for teachers and staff (Szalacha, 2003). GSAs also increased the amount of intervention by teachers in regards to homophobic victimization (Kosicw, 2010), reduced the risk of suicide, and increased the achievement of sexual minorities in higher education (Goodenow et al., 2006; Walls, Freedenthal, & Wisneski, 2008).

Limited research in regards to transgender. Despite thegrowing number of LGBT grouped studies there is little research to give credence to transgender students in education.Rands (2009) stated that, “Transgender issues are completely missing from the field of teacher education” (p. 421). For example, McGarry’s (2013) education article, “Respect, resilience, and LGBT students,” expresses the need for supportive adults, curriculum that is LGBT inclusive, and safe environments like GSAs, but does nothing to educate administrators and their staff about the unique differences between gender identity and sexuality. Thenegative school environments that transgender youth face may not benefit from interventions that specifically support LGB youth (McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell, 2010).

Difficulty with transgender identity.Because gender identity may not often present itself in the media as a normal part of society, students experience low levels of comfort when discussing the topic with peers and family (Jones, 2008). One male to female (MTF) transgender student in Grossman and D’Augelli’s study said that attending school was “the most traumatic aspect of growing up” (2006, p. 122). The negative reactions towards transgender students by peers can cause a peer to question the transgender student’s gender and may result in physical abuse (Grosssman & D’Augelli, 2006). The lack of adult regular support and fear of not fitting in increase the complexity for transgender students in society and in schools (Munoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002; Weiler, 2003).

Negative experiences of transgender students.The school environment is likely the setting in which transgender students experience their first victimization (D’Augelli et al., 2006; Henning-Stout, James, & Macintosh, 2000).Transgender youth in K-12 reported that 78% experienced harassment, 35% experienced physical assault, and 12% experienced sexual violence. Fifteen percent of the transgender students in education reported leaving school altogether because of harassment (Grant et al., 2011). The experience of abuse increases as transgender youth get older. Sausa (2005) found that 96% of transgender people ages 16-21 experienced verbal harassment and 83% experienced physical harassment. One study found that school MTF youth experienced higher rates of physical assault (43%) than FTM youth respondents (34%) (Grant et al., 2011). Transgender students have experienced isolation and harassment from not only their school aged peers but from some adult staff members of the school as well (Morrow, 1997). Grant et al. (2011) found that:

Mistreatment by teachers and staff in K-12 was also severe and had an even greater negative impact than mistreatment by peers. Respondents experienced considerable abuse, including harassment and bullying (31%), physical assault (5%) and sexual assault (3%) at the hands of teachers and staff. (p. 38)

Negative affects of transgender abuse.Students who do not feel safe are less likely to attend school. Because of attendance issues, transgender youth are also at risk for low levels of academic success (Rosenberg, 2002; Kosciw, 2009). When high levels of victimization of transgender youth were reported, they tended to have lower grade point averages and fewer plans to attend the university after high school (Greytak et al., 2009). The dilemma that transgender people have is the fear of not being able to pass as a member of the identified gender by society and their peers. If these individuals are not accepted as his or her identified gender, he or she will face extreme mortification and discrimination (Serrano, 2007).

While the effects of physical and psychological abuse declined in later stages of life, MTF individuals reported a strong correlation between gender-related abuse and major depression (Nuttbrock et al., 2010). The feelings of isolation can be detrimental to emotional well-being and can intensify depression, anxiousness, substance abuse, self-harm, and suicidal tendencies. All of these behaviors are widespread amongst transgender youth (Gapka & Raj, 2003) and exceeds that of the general population (Budge, Adelson, & Howard, 2013).A report of the discrimination of transgenders by Grant et al. (2011) found that:

More than half (51%) of respondents who were harassed, physically or sexually assaulted, or expelled because of their gender identity/expression reported having attempted suicide. . . . And three-quarters (76%) of those who were assaulted by teachers or staff reported having attempted suicide. (p. 33)

The consequences of bullying towards transgender individuals increase their risk of joblessness, homelessness, and substance abuse (“Peer Violence and Bullying,” 2011). A study by Durso & Gates (2012) found that about 4% of homeless youth are transsexual. While the percentage may seem low, only 0.3% of the population of the United States was estimated to be identified as transgender (Gates, 2011).

Positive transgender experiences with GSA.Greytak, Kosciw, & Boesen (2013) found that GSAs had positive affects on transgender youth. Through the involvement of GSA transgender youth experienced lower levels of victimization and greater attendance because of lower concerns of lack of safety. The study found that GSAs could potentially benefit transgender students more than their LGB counterparts because transgender students are more likely to attend the meetings and LGB issues are more prevalent in society.

## Transgender Youth Alternatives to Traditional Schools

Magnet schools have become a viable instrument in providing parents with school choice for their transgender child (Goldring & Phillips, 2008). These schools can specialize their school’s values on particular student achievements as alternatives to traditional schools (Friedman, 1962). Charter schools can provide parents with the opportunity for smaller class size that may provide students with a more individualized education (Kleitz, Weiher, Tedin, & Matland, 2000). Private schools may offer opportunities for a school environment that focuses on curriculum and discipline (Bauch, 1988; Erickson, 1986; Kraushaa, 1972). Socio-economic status is usually a deciding factor on the decision for families to attend a private school (Goldring & Phillips, 2008).

Because safety and lack of belonging are main concerns for transgender youth, they often will attend school environments that are less traditional, such as charter schools, or may complete a general equivalency diploma (GED). Many transgender youth reported hardship when attempting to maintain stability in traditional school climates. Transgender youth were shown to have multiple school transfers in order find a school in which they would feel accepted (McGuire et al., 2010).

Alternative schools provide transgender youth with a learning environment that is more tolerant of one’s gender status (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006). Transgender students reported that the harassment by other students experienced in traditional schools was reduced once they attended alternative or charter schools. Non-traditional school environments provided an accepting environment that included several gender minorities and homeless youth. The transgender youth saw high value in the safety provided by these alternative environments (McGuire et al., 2010).

## Summary

The review of the literature focuses on factors that contribute to school choice, public awareness of transgender, laws enacted to protect transgender students, gender stereotypes created by society, LGBT students in school, and alternative schools for transgender youth.Transgender students present themselves with unique factors that do not always apply in LGB groups.The integration of these factors may give families with transgender children possible criteria to make well-informed decisions in regards to school choice for transgender youth in secondary education. Chapter three will give a description of the research methodology, data collection, and data analysis.

# Chapter 3: Methodology

## Research Design Overview

The research for this study will be a qualitative case study using open-ended interview questions to determine the experience of a family with a transgender child in secondary school and the factors that have led to school choice. The parents’ perceived level of support that the school offers to their transgender child will also be explored.

## Setting/Participants

The data collection will take place in a private location that will give privacy to the sensitivity of the interview questions such as the participant’s home. The participants will include parents in which at least one of their children identifies as a transgender child that is attending secondary school. An intact family is chosen to reduce variables such as divorce or parent separation that may affect this study. Each participate must have the cognitive ability and willingness to participate in an interview of variable length. The family must also be in an area in which they have the opportunity to choose from more than one school.

## Instruments/Measures

The participants will be asked open-ended questions about their experience. The interview will be audio recorded. Some example questions include: What perceptions did you have of the school that was chosen for your transgender child? What modifications, if any, have been made for transgender students? What are the factors you used to determine school choice? Common themes will be developed from the transcriptions of the interviews.

## Procedures

The participants will be selected through word of mouth and convenience sampling. The researcher will explain to the parents that this is a study to understand the experience of a transgender family and how their experience has made an impact on secondary school choice. The researcher will give the family one week to decide if they are willing to participate in the study. The parents of the transgender child must provide consent to be able to participate in the study. The researcher will tell the family that the researcher will change any identifying information to make the information confidential. Following the signing of consent forms, the researcher will conduct the interview using open-ended questions. Each parent will be interviewed individually. For the safety of the subjects, at any point, the participants can choose to stop the interview process. A qualified mental health professional will be readily available at an agreed upon site if the participants experience difficult emotions as a result of the interview questions. The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. All recordings will be locked in a secure location to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Once the recording is transcribed omitting any personal identifiable information, the audio recording will be deleted. The transcriptions will be placed in a password-protected folder. The participants will be given an opportunity to screen the transcription to remove any information that they may not want disclosed in the study.

## Data Processing/Analysis

Data will be gathered through in-depth interviews. After the recordings are transcribed, themes will be developed from the data. Direct quotes and themes developed will then be compared to relevant literature.

## Ethical Considerations

Because of the sensitivity of the topic, the participants may experience strong emotional reactions to the research questions. The researcher will ensure that participants understand that they may stop at any time that they have feelings of discomfort. If needed, an on-site qualified mental health professional will be available to the participants. Because transgender children may have a higher chance of bullying, depression, and suicide than their non-transgendered peers personal identifiers will be modified by providing pseudonyms and generalizing the geographic area to minimize the impact on the family.

## Summary

The benefits of this study exceed the risks because it will provide schools with an understanding of the needs of transgender families in regards to secondary school support. With this information, families, teachers, administrators, and districts in California will be able to implement policies and procedures that will ensure safety and social equity to transgendered students when implementing AB 1266.

# Chapter 4: Results

## Introduction

The relationship between secondary education transgender students and school choice has not been researched in depth. This study set out to determine: (a) In what ways does a transgender student family’s experience impact secondary school choice? And (b) What support and support systems do educational institutions provide to give transgender students and their families the best opportunity for educational achievement?

To understand the context of the participants, the family and participant demographics are provided. Themes were developed from the transcribed interviews based on the two research questions. The four major themes that were generated from the research were: transgender experience, school choice factors, school choice impact, and cultural shifts.

In order to maintain a cohesive narrative style of the transgender family’s experience and protect the identity of the participants, pseudonyms were used for the names of the participants, their children, and the children’s schools.

## Family Demographics

There are five people in the Caucasian, middle class family. The parents, Parker and Amber, have lived in their San Diego County home for 17 years and have been married for 22 years. They have three children: Dave, the eldest son who attends King High School, a comprehensive high school with over 2,500 students, Starlyn, a M2F transgender child who was born as Zander, who attends Del Rio High School, a magnet school with over 1,000 students, and Billy, the youngest son who attends an elementary school with over 500 students. All of the children’s schools are within the same unified school district.

Parker.Parker is a 52-year-old male who works in construction trade industry. His father was a chaplain in the military and they lived in various cities when growing up. Parker completed high school proficiency and then went to trade school. He identifies as a Protestant Christian and considers his political standing as Fiscally Conservative.

Amber.Amber is a 49-year-old woman who works as classified staff in the local school district. She grew up in the San Francisco Bay area and has completed some college. She identified her religion as Christian Evangelical free and considers her political party to be Liberal Conservative.

## Data Analysis

The parents, Parker and Amber, were interviewed individually using open-ended questions in relation to their transgender family experience and choice of school (see Appendix B for interview questions). The recorded interviews were transcribed and coded for emerging themes. For example, some of the open ended questions that led to the theme of transgender experience were:

* When growing up, what was your socialization around gender?
* Are you aware of any bullying, discrimination, victimization, harassment, or negative sentiment (experienced by your child)?
* Are you aware of your child experiencing isolation, alienation, or rejection?
* Has your transgender son or daughter had any experience with depression, anxiety, stress, guilt, or shame because of an occurrence that has happened at school?

From there, any significant occurrences that the family experienced, such as roles of gender, prejudice, and depression, were grouped together under the category transgender experience. The process of developing themes from common terms was repeated for the remaining major themes of school choice factors, school choice impact, and cultural shifts.

## Themes

Themes were generated from the data provided by the transcriptions of the interviews. The major themes are organized in tables that contain themes that are subordinate to the major theme listed as the title. Table one shows the four major themes that were derived from analysis of the transcriptions and gives the subordinate themes that were used to develop the four major themes.

Table 1

*Major Themes Derived From Analysis*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Major themes | Subordinate themes |
| Transgender experience | Gender roles, prejudice, identity recognition, coming out, confidence |
| School choice factors | Reputation, safety, school size |
| School choice impact | Environment, proactive school, relationships, academic success |
| Cultural shifts | School staff, students, parents, community |

In the first major theme, transgender experience, roles of gender were identified. Experiences of prejudice occurred that deviated from the cultural norms of others. Eventually, Starlyn recognized that her physical male appearance did not match her female mind. The shame that Starlyn felt caused her to conceal her true identity from her family. By hiding her true identity, she isolated herself from her family and then spiraled into depression. Because the family provided her with a safe environment, Starlyn was able to come out to her family and begin the journey towards confidence. The second major theme generated was school choice factors. Amber and Parker revealed that reputation, safety, and school size were important factors in determining school choice for their transgender child. Within safety, they identified with fear, protection, and trust. The third major theme demonstrated the impact that the school of choice has had on the family. Amber and Parker noted that the school provided a positive physical and cultural environment that was proactive in providing support for the family. This ultimately led Starlyn to achieve academic success in her first year of high school. The final major theme addressed the cultural shifts that have been occurring with transgender students in education with respect to school staff, students, parents, and community.

## Transgender Experience

The transgender experience of the family was developed using the subordinate themes: gender roles, prejudice, identity recognition, and coming out. Table two shows the first major theme, transgender experience, and the corresponding subordinate themes for each category.

Table 2

*Transgender experience*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Superordinate theme | Theme | Subordinate theme |
| Gender roles |  |  |
| Prejudice | Ignorance |  |
|  | Rejection |  |
| Identity recognition | Shame |  |
|  | Concealment | Isolation |
|  |  | Depression |
| Coming out |  |  |
| Confidence |  |  |

Gender roles.When describing the roles of gender when Amber, the interviewed mother, was a child, she said that her family values were very conservative and traditional. Her father was the patriarchal figure of the household who made all decisions and generated the family income. Amber described her mother as a “second-class citizen” who stayed at home (personal communication, March 25, 2014).

In contrast with how they were raised, Amber and Parker were able to see beyond traditional gender roles. They recognized early on that each of their children were different and had individualized interests, needs. Amber stated:

* We’ve always known that she [Starlyn] was a different kid . . . even before she came out as being transgender. . . . Our oldest kid was just the typical boy: trucks, balls, skateboards. . . . She was never like that so they’ve [the children] always had different activities and different interests. (personal communication, March 25, 2014)
* Prejudice.The prejudice that the family has faced has come mostly from other parents and never first hand. Starlyn has a friend whose parents are divorced. The divorced mother is accepting of Starlyn’s identity while the father has expressed to others that he is not in approval of Starlyn’s transgender identity. This limits the time that Starlyn’s friend is able to play to only when Starlyn’s friend is with her mother (Amber, personal communication, March 25, 2014).
* A lack of tolerance was also seen in the family’s church. Amber said that she had to pick and choose her relationships in the church:
* There’s just a tradition of being very right wing and not necessarily very tolerant. . . There’s [sic] some people that I don’t choose to share my life with because . . . they’re not even interested in being educated about this. . . . I’m not going to spend my time trying to educate because I know it’s all about *love* [emphasis added]. (personal communication, March 25, 2014)
* Amber’s emphasis on love demonstrates that there is a genuine care for others even though they may not fit the cultural norms of society.
* Ignorance***.*** The experiences of ignorance from Starlyn’s peers may have been due to the lack of knowledge that students have around the term transgender. In some portions of the interview, Amber would refer to Starlyn as Zander to identify the particular gender identity prior to coming out. Amber would also use the pronouns “he” to identify Zander as pre-coming out and “she” to identify Starlyn as post-coming out. Amber said that Zander’s male peers were confused with his identity by asking, “Well, what are you? Are you gay? . . . What’s the deal?” In another situation, a couple of children were trying to educate themselves regarding Starlyn’s gender identity, but did not use the correct language to communicate their ideas. While this initially offended Starlyn, she was able to later accept one of the boy’s apology and educate her peer on her identity (personal communication, March 25, 2014).
* Starlyn also experienced ignorance when a child was not ready to comprehend who or what Starlyn was as a transgender child. Amber said:

I have a friend whose daughter was almost in tears because she had known Starlyn as a boy and was completely confused by what she saw. So I think maybe the sheltered kids that go there [DRHS] can be a bit of a negative because they . . . don’t know what to make of this. (personal communication, March 25, 2014)

* Rejection***.*** Even though Starlyn was heavily involved in the church, the dominant experience of rejection came from a specific church incident. Amber said, “[S]omebody at church, not in a leadership position, . . . said something about homosexuality being a sin. And from that point on she [Starlyn] thought that she wasn’t welcomed” (personal communication, March 25, 2014). The rejection and shame Starlyn felt by this incident led to a downward spiral of depression.
* Identity recognition.While describing Starlyn’s experience of coming out, Amber noted that Starlyn was conflicted with her identity, especially given the reactions she received when other’s thought she was a gay male. The shame Starlyn felt caused her to hide her true self from her family and friends (personal communication, March 25, 2014).
* Shame***.*** Starlyn shielded her experience from her parents. When faced with harassment from other children Amber said, “I think she was embarrassed and she just wanted it to go away. She just tried to stay away” (personal communication, March 25, 2014).

Concealment***.*** Starlyn struggled with her gender identity because she had to present her physical appearance as a male to avoid discrimination from her school peers. Amber said, “She [Starlyn] had to be thinking all the time, ‘Walk like a boy. [pause] Walk like a boy. [pause] Talk like a boy. [pause] Talk like a boy.’ I think that weighed on her” (personal communication, March 25, 2014).

* Isolation*.*Eventually, the experience of rejection and shame caused Starlyn to isolate herself from both family and school. Amber said that, “She [Starlyn] spent a tremendous amount of time in her room. It was real hard to get her involved in family activities. It was hard to get her to be involved in anything” (personal communication, March 25, 2014). Initially, Starlyn did not communicate her inner gender experience to anyone in her family. Although Starlyn would say to her family that everything was fine, Amber said, “She would come up and she would eat dinner with us, and then hang out for about 15 minutes and then we wouldn’t see her again ‘till the next day” (personal communication, March 25, 2014).After coming out, Starlyn later revealed to Amber what the experience of having the essence of a female confined in a male’s body was like:
* [S]he felt from a really young age that God had just made a mistake and put her brain in the wrong body. She felt that she was always supposed to be a girl and . . . there was some little girl out there with her boy brain. There was some kind of cosmic switch. Wrong brain; wrong body. . . . God just had made a mistake. And then to hear that God hated her for his mistake. That was really hard. (personal communication, March 25, 2014)
* Because Starlyn’s experience was unique, it is possible that this may have caused her to feel distant from her peers and family. Eventually, the church incident caused her to be “very isolated and I would say pretty depressed” (Amber, personal communication, March 25, 2014).
* Depression. Starlyn’s depression started around age 10 or 11 and continued until age 14 (Amber, personal communication, March 25, 2014). While Starlyn was in middle school, Amber received a phone call from the nurse that she had been cutting. Amber said, “She had hid it under her sleeve and one of her friends told somebody at the school. Maybe the nurse, and so they called me. She [the nurse] said, ‘You know I have to report it’” (personal communication, March 25, 2014). At the time, Starlyn explained to her mother that the cutting was an accident. Amber perceived this to not be true because she noticed that the cuts under her sleeve appeared to be deliberate. Because of this incident, the family sought counseling to determine the root of the problem. Amber described Starlyn’s preliminary reaction to the counseling session:
* She wasn’t ready to talk. . . . She was . . . very defensive. Very angry. . . . [A]t that point we thought that our son was probably gay and was struggling with it. And that was the feeling that the counselor got and said, ‘you know he’ll tell you when he’s ready to tell you. . . . [P]ushing him at this point isn’t doing him any good.’ (personal communication, March 25, 2014).

Because Starlyn was not ready to show her true identity, her parents were not fully able to help their child through her identity crisis. Parker said, “You try to help but you don’t know. . . She had to come to terms with whatever was going on” (personal communication, March 25, 2014).

* Eventually the cutting stopped. Upon reflection of when she asked Zander why he was cutting, Amber shared:
* Our son at the time said, ‘[W]ell I just read that it makes you feel better when you’re really sad, but it didn’t really make me feel any better. So I’m not going to do it anymore.’ So the cutting did stop but we really didn’t get any answers to what was behind it.” (personal communication, March 25, 2014)

Coming out.Amber revealed thatthe lines of communication between parent and child were finally open. The cutting incident provided a pathway to heal Starlyn’s internal wounds. After about four or five months from admitting the cutting, Starlyn came out to Amber:

He told me he was actually our daughter and I think within a week of that I said, ‘Is that why you were cutting?’ and she said, ‘Yah. I was really sad.’ Then I said, ‘But you don’t want to do that now?’ ‘No, no, I’m ecstatic. I don’t need to do that now.’ (personal communication, March 25, 2014)

The coming out process helped to shift the experiences of rejection, shame, and concealment that Starlyn had in her past into feelings of joy and happiness. Amber expressed that she was glad that the school let her know of the cutting because it brought the issue of gender identity to the forefront. Amber said, “[I]t gave her [Starlyn] the chance to see that we were going to be ok with whatever she had tell us. We were open to listening” (Amber, personal communication, March 25, 2014). The loving support that the parents gave to their “new” daughter was crucial in providing Starlyn with the opportunity to overcome her negative experiences and build confidence and assurance of a successful future.

Confidence**.** Amber had assumed that Starlyn would choose to go to KHS because her older brother, Dave, went there. Amber described her reaction as being “floored” when Starlyn expressed the desire to go to DRHS. After coming out, Amber described Starlyn as being confident from the beginning by saying, “‘Mom, it’s not like it used to be. Dad, it’s not like it was when you were in school. People aren’t like that anymore and I have lots of friends and lots of support’”(Amber, personal communication, March 25, 2014). When asked who made the choice to go to DRHS, Amber said that it was 70% Starlyn and 30% parents, while Parker had differing percentages and said it was 100% Starlyn’s choice (personal communication, March 25, 2014). Whether the numbers agree or not, the fact of the matter is that both parents placed the majority of the decision on school choice on their child. Starlyn’s level of confidence was increased due to supportive parents. Parker said:

She has a certain level of confidence because she knows I think she’s pretty smart; she knows how to work her way through things. . . . She works hard in school and it’s paying off . . . she can see it and it builds on itself. (personal communication, March 25, 2014)

Although Starlyn’s level of confidence is mostly at an eight or nine out of ten, Amber says Starlyn still has moments of being a normal teenager:

There’s some days where she doesn’t feel real good physically and she may not put much time into her appearance. And that might make her fly a little bit lower. But for the most part, I think now that she’s living as her true self, she’s pretty ecstatic. (Amber, personal communication, March 25, 2014)

## School Choice Factors

The factors that determined school choice was developed using the subordinate themes: reputation, safety, and school size. Table three shows the second major theme, school choice factors, and the corresponding subordinate themes for each category.

Reputation**.** Amber said that the perception from some parents is that KHS is not the responsible choice if you want your child to go to college (personal communication, March 25, 2014).

Table 3

*School Choice Factors*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Theme | Subordinate theme |
| Reputation |  |
| Safety | Fear |
|  | Protection |
|  | Trust |
| School size |  |

Although this may have been the perception of some of her peers, she approved of her eldest son, Dave, to attend KHS:

I chose to let my older child go there because he loves the music program. And it’s a phenomenal thing. I had people who were *shocked* [emphasis added] that we would consider it. But then they find out . . . he’s in the band. . . . [H]e’ll be sheltered. It’ll be ok [laughter] as if everybody there is carrying knives. The perception is that the other high school is a pretty rough place” (personal communication, March 25, 2014).

The laughter suggests that Amber was being sarcastic about students carrying knives to school and that she does feel it is a safe place for her children. From Amber’s sarcasm it seems that she feels comfortable with her oldest child attending KHS despite the judgment of other parents.

Amber knew of a transgender female who was a graduate of KHS. Amber described the transgender female’s time there as generally positive because she was involved in a variety of extra curricular activities. However, Amber also mentioned that the transgender female was sometimes bullied, teased, and not fully supported by her peers because of her transgender identity (personal communication, March 25, 2014).

Safety**.** The theme of safety that was provided by the school was developed using the subordinate themes: fear, protection, and trust.

Fear***.*** Based on experiences of other transgender families, Amber was expecting to have to fight the school’s administration to advocate for her transgender child to have equal rights (personal communication, March 25, 2014). This occurred before the recent California law on equitable access for transgender students was passed. Amber’s fear was intensified when she described how difficult it was for her on Starlyn’s first day of high school living as a transgender female. Amber said, “I felt like I wanted to walk 15 feet behind her all the time. . . . I was waiting for problems. The first day was so scary to let her go (personal communication, March 25, 2014).

Protection**.** Parker expressed that protection was one of the main priorities that he had in regards to safety. Parker showed his concern for Starlyn coming out right before she was starting high school by saying, “Maybe we should wait ‘till after [Starlyn graduates from] high school [for her to come out as a transgender female] because of the safety. I’m thinking man you’re going to get picked on” (personal communication, March 25, 2014).

Trust***.*** The parents both had a lack of trust that Starlyn would be safe in public school as a transgender female. Amber said:

When she first transitioned; when she first started to live as she truly is, I wanted to just be there all the time and so did my husband. It was really difficult for us to allow her to go out in the world and trust that she was going to be ok. (personal communication, March 25, 2014)

Parker explained the importance of trusting that school can keep his child safe by saying, “[I]f you can’t send your kid to school and have them safe then I wont send them there. Life’s too short for that” (personal communication, March 25, 2014).When asked about the level of confidence that the teachers and administration can provide safety for their child, Parker responded with doubt, “Under the public school system? I don’t know. . . . It’s just there’s a lot of kids (Parker, personal communication, March 25, 2014). The doubt that Parker expressed communicated that the size of a school is a major factor in determining the safety of a school for his children.

School size.Both Parker and Amber expressed how school size played a roll in choice of school. Amber said that King HS could have been a good school because it was bigger and she could possibly meet more people like her. At the same time, there was also a concern that it would increase the chance of people who are not interested in learning about transgender issues and Starlyn may have to deal with increased ignorance, differing opinions, negative attitudes, and unkindness (personal communication, March 25, 2014).

Parker echoed the possible intolerance of a larger school by saying, “DRHS would be a little more tolerant just because KHS is so big. . . . [H]ow can you watch 3,000 students or I don’t even know how many are there . . . I think there’s less numbers at DRHS” (personal communication, March 25, 2014). Amber was drawn to the fact that DRHS could potentially have smaller class sizes as well (personal communication, March 25, 2014).

The small school size of DRHS has also allowed Starlyn’s parents to feel that the staff and students are very connected. Amber said, “[S]he’s only been there for half a year but a lot of people know who she is” (personal communication, March 25, 2014).

## School Choice Impact

The theme of school choice impact was developed using the subordinate themes: environment, proactive school, relationships, and academic success. Table four shows the third major theme, school choice impact, and the corresponding subordinate themes for each category.

Environment**.** The physical and cultural environment has played a roll in the parents feeling confident about choosing DRHS.

Table 4

*School Choice Impact*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Theme | Subordinate theme |
| Environment | Physical |
|  | Cultural |
| Proactive school |  |
| Relationships |  |
| Academic success |  |

Physical**.** According to the Amber, Starlyn has had no issues with using the girl’s locker room or bathroom. Amber said that Starlyn is, “just one of the girls in the locker room. Nobody has said a word about it. Never had an issue in the restroom” (personal communication, March 25, 2014). When previewing the school, Amber said that her daughter loved the science rooms and was impressed with the Apple Macbooks in the music composition class. These items were in line with Starlyn’s interests. “[We] took a tour and we went into the physics lab and her [Starlyn’s] eyes just lit up. *This is amazing* [emphasis added]!” (personal communication, March 25, 2014).

Cultural***.*** Culture played a crucial role in the satisfaction of school choice. Amber said, “I can’t think of a more nurturing place, in all honesty. I think they are very accepting of all the kids there. There are several openly gay [student] couples. I think it’s a really healthy environment for [Starlyn]” (Amber, personal communication, March 25, 2014). The level of confidence that the parents have for the school is high. “I would be more surprised if she came home and there was a problem. We’ve been pleasantly surprised” (Amber, personal communication, March 25, 2014).

Based on the experiences of the family, there have been more instances of acceptance of transgender people. Parker says, “[P]eople are really tolerant. It’s really nice. It’s not like when we went to school” (personal communication, March 25, 2014).

Proactive school.The staff and students took the initiative once they found out that Starlyn was going to attend their school. In eighth grade, Starlyn had signed up to be involved with ASB at DRHS. When the DRHS students had initially met Starlyn prior to her transition, she presented her outside appearance as a male. After her transition, Starlyn went to the ASB interviews and presented herself as a female. Upon observing the change, the ASB students informed their school counselor. The counselor called Amber to provide support to Starlyn and her family. Amber was very appreciative that the school had gone out of their way to provide support for her child(personal communication, March 25, 2014).

The level of proactive acceptance can also be seen in the interactions that students had with their peers. Amber said this of Starlyn’s experience at DRHS:

It’s . . . almost uncool to not be accepting. She thinks the peer pressure now is that you need to accept people who are different and, if you don’t, you’re the jerk. You’ve got the problem. Not the transgender student. You’re going to wind up being the person who is ridiculed . . . or pushed aside because you’re being unaccepting of somebody just because they are different. And she said that to me more than once. (personal communication, March 25, 2014)

Relationships**.** Both parents have seen the benefit that relationships have in Starlyn’s decision to go to DRHS. The staff and students at school provide a great fit for her personality. The parent’s experience thus far is that all teachers, staff, and administration have been tolerant, supportive, and accepting of Starlyn (personal communication, March 25, 2014). Amber had mentioned that some parents have also contacted her to also give words of support and encouragement. Some parents have even taken this as an opportunity to educate their children to help their kids understand and feel comfort around transgender issues. Amber did mention that if someone had anything unkind to say, they were probably keeping it to him or herself (personal communication, March 25, 2014).

One of the ways that Starlyn involves herself in the school is through ASB. Parker said, “They had a dance the other day and she helped set up for it. . . . It was a lot of work for her. I think she had a good time. It keeps her involved. . . . This has really brought her out to be a little more social” (personal communication, March 25, 2014).

Another extra curricular activity that Starlyn is involved in is Gay Straight Alliance (GSA).Amber explained Starlyn’s initial experience with GSA:

She wasn’t sure that she wanted to join [GSA] and some of her friends encouraged her. ‘Well let’s all go.’ And so she went and people were going around the room and said, ‘My name is A and I’m here because I’m bisexual.’ ‘My name is B and I’m here because I’m a lesbian.’ ‘I’m here because I’m so and so’s friend.’ And she [Starlyn] stood up and said my name’s Starlyn and I’m here because I’m [snaps] *totally transgender* [emphasis added].” And then they all clapped for her. [S]he said . . . she felt appreciated and accepted right off the bat. They were proud of her for being able to stand up and say that. (personal communication, March 25, 2014)

Because of GSA, Starlyn is more involved with school and has become the freshman representative for GSA at DRHS. GSA has become an extra curricular activity that Starlyn does not want to miss and she will go out of her way so that she does not miss those meetings. Starlyn was able to participate in activities such as ice skating, bowling, and movie night because the group provides a safe environment in which her or her friends do not have to be singled out. These students also have had opportunities to build relationships with GSA groups from other high schools to build a larger support network. The GSA advisor also offers an adult on campus that can provide Starlyn with support if it is needed (Amber, personal communication, March 25, 2014).

Academic success.At DRHS, Starlyn is enrolled in Advanced Placement classes and received a 4.4 grade point average (Parker, personal communication, March 25, 2014). Starlyn has future goals of going to college and wants to make an impact on the world. Amber said, “She wants to be famous [laughter] she wants to do something big I don’t know what yet exactly. But she’s got great plans”(personal communication, March 25, 2014).

Parker’s expectation for Starlyn is that she needs to pursue higher education. He saw education as the factor that will help her to provide economical and social stability. Parker was aware that, without an education, that the rates for homelessness and professional success are lower for transgender youth (personal communication, March 25, 2014).

## Cultural Shifts

The cultural shifts that the family experienced were developed using the subordinate themes: school staff, students, parents, and community. Table five shows the final major theme, cultural shifts, and the corresponding subordinate themes for each category.

School staff.Parker recommends that school staff treat transgender students just like he or she is another student and be accepting of people. Parker said, “[I]f they’re in a spot where they can’t accept people then they’re in the wrong job. They should go do something else” (personal communication, March 25, 2014).

Table 5

*Cultural Shifts*

|  |
| --- |
| Theme |
| School Staff |
| Students |
| Parents |
| Community |

Amber’s recommendation is that school staff use the proper pronoun; adding that using the incorrect pronoun can put transgender students in danger of being ridiculed by their peers. This is also important when substitute teachers are in the classroom. A substitute teacher that hasn’t been informed may call a student by a masculine name and see a student in a skirt (personal communication, March 25, 2014). Amber truly appreciated that the DRHS counselor reached out to her and offered support to the family (personal communication, March 25, 2014).

Amber hopes that administrators will use the letter of the law to provide the right accommodations for transgender students. In defense of Starlyn using the girl’s restroom Amber said:

I would like people to be educated about the fact that the last thing my daughter is interested in is your daughter in the bathroom or your daughter in the gym locker. She [Starlyn] just wants to do what she needs to do and get on with her life. And you hear people say, ‘Well why don’t we just give them their own bathroom?’ And I would really not want administration to give into that because it’s separate but equal. If all of her friends [are] walking across campus and three of them go over here and she’s gotta traipse over here, then that’s not equality. So I would really hope that they would adhere to the letter of the law and not be bullied by parents into bending. (personal communication, March 25, 2014)

Amber believes that teachers are well informed on the law because of the attention that it has been getting in the media (personal communication, March 25, 2014).

Students**.** Amber recommends that students are aware that this is not a choice made by anyone. She likens it to being born with different eye color or handedness. Because the topic of transgender can be an unusual subject, it may be awkward to think about or discuss openly. Amber wants others to know that “they’re really just like the rest of us. They just want to have friends and go to school and live a happy life” (personal communication, March 25, 2014).

Parents**.** Amber recommended that parents educate themselves on the differences between transgender and homosexuality. Amber said this about parent responses to her Starlyn using the bathroom:

‘Wouldn’t [transgender students] be happier if they used the bathroom of their birth sex and wouldn’t they be safer that way?’ *Are you kidding* [emphasis added]? Do you think that my daughter would be safe in a boy’s restroom? I think, if anything, that would be a great place for her to get beat up. (personal communication, March 25, 2014)

While some parents may have commented on forcing students to adhere to their born gender, Amber believes that it will lead to more depression and suicide of transgender youth. Amber truly believes that there is no threat to other students just because her child is transsexual. She said,“It’s just… it’s just about loving people” (personal communication, March 25, 2014).Community**.** Parker suggests that everyone be tolerant. He said, “We’re in a huge society and we have different people and different things” (personal communication, March 25, 2014).To provide respect and protection for transgender youth, Amber suggested for individuals to become educated around the differences that people have to reduce forms of discrimination for all people. Amber provided some insight on the direction that this country has had with regards to transgender issues:

I know that we’re in the best place in the country and the best time in history for this to have happened. I think that we’re incredibly blessed to be doing this now and here because I just know, boy even back in the 80s when my husband and I were in school, this would have not been a pretty thing. I don’t know that administration would have been supportive. But there are always . . . some people who are going to be kind and more accepting. But I don’t that think overall the administration would have even had the power to stand up to . . . parents who were outraged . . . I’m pretty confident that I went to school with kids who would have been terrible and administrators that would have been indifferent. (personal communication, March 25, 2014)

## Summary

The four major themes developed from the data were: transgender experiences, school choice factors, school choice impact, and cultural shifts. The research set out to determine the ways in which the transgender experience impacts secondary school choice and the level of support secondary schools give to transgender students and their families. Chapter five will compare the findings to the existing body of literature and provide implications, limitations, future research, and conclusion for the study.

**Chapter 5: Discussion**

**Introduction**

This study used a qualitative case study method that employed open-ended interview questions of parents of a transgender child to determine the factors that the parents perceived as important in determining school choice. The research questions were: (a) In what ways does a transgender student family’s experience impact secondary school choice? And (b) What support and support systems do educational institutions provide to give transgender students and their families the best opportunity for educational achievement?

This chapter will include the experiences verified by the literature, experiences not verified by the literature, implications, limitations, resulting areas for further research, and concluding thoughts from this study.

## Experiences Verified by the Literature

Many of the experiences faced by the transgender family in this study are corroborated in the literature. Previous research has demonstrated that conservative and religious groups can be less accepting of LGBT issues (Newman, 2002; Olson, Cadge, & Harrison, 2006) and have increased probability of responding negatively to homosexuality (Schulte & Battle, 2004; Schawartz & Lindley, 2005). The negative experience that occurred at church caused Starlyn to isolate from her family. Starlyn’s isolation then led to feelings of depression and self-harm behaviors. This is consistent with previous findings, which have established a relationship between isolation, depression, and self-harm in transgender youth (Gapka & Raj, 2003).

As a result of the negative experiences, the family was fearful for Starlyn’s safety, especially after coming out as a transgender female. This study established that the school environment is a crucial factor in providing a safe place for transgender students. The parents believed that the magnet school would provide a different school environment for their child, which was confirmed by Goldring and Phillips (2008), who found that magnet schools could provide a safe alternative environment for transgender students. Choosing to send Starlyn to a magnet school provided her with an educational experience that is culturally accepting of people who are different. This supports the research in which alternative schools provide a high sense of safety and are more tolerant of students regardless of gender status (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006; McGuire et al., 2010).

The parents in this study were also concerned about class size. Amber believed that a smaller school size would potentially provide Starlyn with an environment that would have less negative attitudes and undesirable opinions of transgender students. One benefit to alternative schools is that they can provide smaller class sizes, which offers a more individualized education (Kleitz, Weiher, Tedin, & Matland, 2000).

A school can offer support to a transgender family through a safe school atmosphere. The environment of the school created a compassionate network for Starlyn, while also providing the family with the assurance of safety, which was essential for the parents. When finding out that Starlyn was transgender, the DRHS students were proactive by telling their GSA advisor. The school staff, in turn, reached out to the family through a school counselor phone call. Thus, the school displayed an effort to provide genuine communication that is needed for positive student interactions (Russell, Seif, & Truong, 2001). The leadership at the school has created a school environment that is based on building relationships and is accepting of people who are different.

Starlyn’s experience in her first year in high school benefited greatly from the support gained from GSA and other extra curricular activities, such as ASB. GSA supports lower levels of victimization and greater attendance for transgender students (Greytak, Kosciw, & Boesen, 2013). The benefits of GSA are also reflected in Starlyn’s desire to not miss school because of her role and involvement in GSA.Both Amber and Parker expressed that the culture presently found in schools is more supportive of LGBT groups than when they attended high school. There has been an increase in tolerance of LGBT rights within the last few decades (Andersen & Fetner, 2008; Gibson, 2007; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Loftus, 2001; Minter, 2012; Newman, 2007).

The negative transgender experiences that the family initially faced caused the family to be fearful for Starlyn’s safety when entering secondary school as a transgender female. When they realized that the magnet school environment was going to be nurturing and supportive of students who are different and offered a small school population, Parker and Amber were reassured that Starlyn would be socially accepted and academically successful.

## Experiences Not Verified in the Literature

While Starlyn exhibited signs of isolation, depression, and self-harm that is common in transgender youth, she was able to overcome those experiences with tenacity, in part due to the unconditional support and love from her parents (Gapka & Raj, 2003). Coming out gave Starlyn the confidence to live in the world as she sees herself. Her self-confidence increased the level of trust that Amber and Parker had in their child, which was shown by their decision to give Starlyn the majority of responsibility when choosing a school. Unrestricted love from the family of transgender youth is essential in providing a safe environment for transgender students to be engaged in school.

While the research suggests that transgender youth will have high percentages of substance abuse, low school attendance, and low academic achievement, this has not been the case in the eyes of Starlyn’s parents (Kosciw. 2009). The interviews demonstrate that Amber and Parker are highly supportive of their transgender child. Starlyn has also been able to achieve academic and social success because of the supportive school environment. The culture of DRHS has provided Starlyn with little to no experiences of transgender specific harassment and has created a culture of supportive acceptance amongst her peers. This was evident in Amber’s recollection of Starlyn’s experience of being in a school culture in which an unaccepting person will be the person who is teased and ridiculed.

Also not found in the literature were the recommendations of Amber and Parker.

Parker advocates for the world to continue to move towards tolerance of others. Amber suggested that school staff be conscious of using “he” for transgender males and “she” for transgender females when using pronouns to identify transgender students. Amber also suggested that restroom use is more of a concern of people who are not accepting of transgender students than the actual transgender student. What was not verified in the literature was the confidence that a transgender student gains from supportive parents, the positive effects that result from a transgender child immersion into a supportive school, the recommendations from parents to create a school campus climate that is tolerant of others, and the use of proper pronouns when relating to transgender people.

## Implications

When considering school choice and transgender students in education, a positive and tolerant school culture and family home environment are the key for transgender youth success. As an administrator, one must pave the path for the promotion of positive characteristic traits by school staff. Character leadership can provide a greater level of acceptance for individuals who are different and gender minority youth. Teachers need to be aware when making classroom decisions that may marginalize transgender students. It is imperative that teachers and administrators use the proper pronouns for transgender students. Because of the high rates of bullying and isolation in transgender youth, teachers and administrators need to be acutely aware of signs of bullying, isolation, depression, and suicide especially with transgender students. Without a strong connection to an adult within the school, transgender youth are unlikely to report any signs of abuse from their peers. Teachers can increase cultural sensitivity to transgender issues by intervening when students ridicule transgender youth. Teachers and administrators can be advocates for transgender students by providing environments like GSA and other extra curricular activities that create a sense of appreciation and acceptance by their peers.

## Limitations

Because the interviews in this study were limited to one family experience of a transgender child, the data gathered from this study may not be generalized to an entire population of transgender families. The information provided by Amber and Parker is limiting in that it only provides the opinions and ideas from a parent perspective. The parents may also have limited their responses to protect the safety and well-being for their child. Another limiting factor is that the researcher did not interview the transgender child, Starlyn, directly. It is possible that Starlyn may not have revealed all of her prior experiences as a transgender female to her parents because of shame that may have occurred in her life. The responses by both Amber and Parker in regards to the experiences of Starlyn are second hand information and may not accurately reflect the definitive truth of Starlyn’s actual experience. However, the research question regarding school choice is largely in the hands of the parents for a child of school age.

## Future Research

Research on transgender students in education is scarce. Further research to broaden the scope of school choice for transgender students and their families would benefit from including more families into the study. This will deepen the understanding of what factors that families with transgender students use to determine school choice. Because the parents in this study gave Starlyn the opportunity to choose her own school, future research should include the first-hand perspective of the student. Starlyn would be able to provide greater insight into the school she chose and the impact that the school has had on her life. Because there are similarities of experiences between transgender students and LGB students, it would also be interesting to compare school choice factors that affect the LGB population as well.

It is still unknown to what degree administrators and teachers in California are educated on transgender issues or the newly implemented laws to protect transgender students. Further research could correlate cultural sensitivity to transgender issues across different types of schools to help families determine the characteristics of schools that may be more culturally accepting of transgender students. It is unknown as to the amount of student discipline issues that the magnet school, DRHS, has. Future research could investigate the degree to which student discipline affects the level of acceptance of transgender students.

Teacher education programs may or may not provide awareness of transgender specific issues to new teachers. One could investigate the extent to which teaching credential programs at universities prepare teachers in cultural awareness of transgender student issues. Further research can also provide insight into the ways that school site leaders provide teachers and their school with the cultural tools to create a safe and nurturing environment for transgender students and their families.

## Conclusion

The primary goal of this study was to determine the impact that a transgender family experience has on secondary school choice and the support systems that are available at schools for transgender students. Because much of the literature focuses on LGBT issues, this study aimed to focus solely on the transgender student’s family experience. The results of the transgender and school experiences found in the study were consistent with current literature. What is unique about this family is the unconditional love demonstrated by the transgender student’s parents. The support from Starlyn’s parents directly translated into her rapid rebound from spiraling depression to radiating self-confidence. A school that provides a tolerant and accepting cultural environment will give transgender students the best opportunity for success. Given that transgender youth have been nearly invisible in educational literature, a secondary goal of this study is to advocate for continued research of transgender youth in education.

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Appendix A

Consent Form



Invitation to Participate

My name is Cyrus Ortiz-Luis. I am a Masters of Education student at California State University San Marcos and a teacher at Vista High School. As a parent of a transgender child in secondary school, you are invited to participate in a research study to understand the experience of parents with a transgender child and the impact on secondary school choice. This information may be used to inform districts, schools, and administrators and provide them with knowledge that may help schools when employing the newly implemented pupil sex-segregated law, AB 1266. The criteria for this study is to be a parent of a child who has identified as transgender and is currently enrolled in secondary school. As a token of appreciation, you will be given a $50 gift card at the completion of the interview.

Requirements of Participation (What you will be asked to do)

You will have the opportunity to answer questions about your experience as a parent of a transgender student and how it has affected secondary school choice. If you agree to participate in this research, the researcher will conduct an audio-recorded interview using open-ended questions at an agreed upon location that you feel is safe and secure. A qualified mental health professional will be on site and available should the need arise. Once the audio is transcribed, you will have the opportunity to read your own individual transcriptions and can delete any portion of the transcription that you do not want included in the study.

Risks

Because the topic may be sensitive, you may experience strong emotional reactions to the research questions. Because transgender children may have a higher chance of bullying, depression, suicide, and substance abuse than their non-transgendered peers, this may bring up memories of lack of safety for you, your child, and/or your family.

Safeguards

You have the right to privacy and all information identifying your child or your family will remain confidential unless otherwise required by law. Names will be changed to a pseudonym when the audio recording is transcribed. Other identifiable information such as school names and geographic locations will also be generalized to a broader region to minimize identification of the student, family school, etc. The researcher will transcribe each interview, delete the audio recording, and keep transcriptions in a password-protected folder. You will have the right to stop the interview at any time. Once the audio recording is transcribed, you will be able to read your own individual transcription and delete any portion of the transcription that you do not want to include in the study.

In the case of any intense emotional reaction, a qualified mental health professional will be on site to provide immediate support. If further emotional support is required or desired, the researcher and mental health professional will provide therapeutic and support group resources.

Benefits

The research involved with this study will benefit people involved in the educational system. Information provided in this study will provide school districts, administrators, teachers, parents of transgender children, students, and the community with a greater understanding of how to create safe schools for transgender students and families.

Voluntary Participation **and** Contact Information

The California State University San Marcos Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved this study. If you have questions about the study, you may direct those to the researcher, Cyrus Ortiz-Luis, cortizluis@gmail.com, (760) XXX-XXXX, or the researcher’s advisor/professor, Dr. Carol Van Vooren, cvanvoor@csusm.edu, (760) XXX-XXXX. Questions about your rights as a research participant should be directed to the IRB at (760) 750-4029. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to participate in this research study. \_\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to have the interview audiotaped.

Parent’s Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Parent’s Signature \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Researcher’s Signature \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Appendix B

Interview Questions

The following is the framework for the questions used in the interviews. Follow up questions may be asked depending on participant responses.

Demographics

* What is your age?
* How long have you been married?
* Where did you grow up?
* How long have you lived in your current location?
* What is your education level?
* What socio-economic class would you define your household to be (lower, middle, upper class)?
* How many children do you have and what type of schools do they attend (elementary, middle, high school, other, magnet, charter, private)?
* What are your religious affiliations or spiritual beliefs, if any?
* How has this affected your opinion towards transgender people?
* Would you classify yourself as conservative, liberal, or other?
* How has this affected your opinion towards transgender people?

Gender/LGBT/transgender

* When growing up, what was your socialization around gender (for example: what were the roles of men and women?)
* What was your perception of people identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual when growing up?
* What were your exposures and/or reactions to transgender people when growing up?
* How was gender roles discussed to your children as they were growing up?

Transgender Child in School

* When did your transgender child communicate to you that s/he is transsexual?
* Has your family communicated to the school that s/he is transsexual?
* If so, how and when was entering your child as a transgender student communicated to the school?
* What assumptions and/or perceptions did you have of the school that was chosen for the transgender child to attend?
* What assumptions and/or perceptions did you have of the school/s that were not chosen for the transgender child to attend?
* What was the perceived reputation of the school/s that were not chosen?
* What was the perceived reputation of the school that was chosen?
* What is your perceived acceptance level of transgender students from:

Teachers?

Administration?

Students?

Parents?

* What is your perceived level of support of transgender students from:

Teachers?

Administration?

Students?

Parents?

* What is your perceived level of support of creating a culture of belonging of transgender students from:

Teachers?

Administration?

Students?

Parents?

* What is your perceived level of connectedness of transgender students from:

Teachers?

Administration?

Students?

Parents?

* What is your perceived level of confidence and self-esteem that your child has in school?
* What factors at the chosen school provide your transgender child with academic success?
* What opportunities does your child have for engagement in the chosen school?
* Does the school chosen for the transgender child have a Gay Student Alliance (GSA)?
* If so, is your child involved in the club and what is the perceived experience that your child receives from GSA?
* What is your perceived experience of the chosen school’s climate and/or culture?
* What modifications, if any, have been made for transgender students (i.e. bathroom, sports)?
* What is the level of support, if any, from the district office?
* What opportunities for extra curricular are or are not provided at the school that was chosen?
* How important were your child’s current set of friends in choosing a school?

Victimization, Harassment, Depression

* Are you aware of any bullying, discrimination, victimization, harassment, or negative sentiment from:

Teachers?

Students?

Administration?

Parents?

Families?

* Is bullying, discrimination, victimization, harassment, or negative sentiment a concern for you in regards to the school that was chosen?
* Are you aware of your child experiencing isolation, alienation, or rejection at school?
* Has your transgender son or daughter had any experience with depression, anxiety, stress, guilt, or shame because of an occurrence that has happened at school?

Are there specific programs at the school to reduce these factors?

* Are you aware of any substance abuse that your transgender child may have experienced?
* Has your child had any issues with school attendance?
* What was the coming out process like for your child around school?

Was your transgender child teased before coming out?

Were school officials notified?

* Are you confident that the teachers, administration, students, etc. can provide anti-bullying support for your transgender child?
* Are you confident that teachers, administration, students, etc. can handle harassment of transgender students?

Positive Experiences

* What are your transgender son or daughter’s future goals?
* Does your transgender child have an advocate, mentor, role models, and/or allies at school?
* Are you aware if the teachers have any training in regards to supporting transgender students?

Positive and Negative Aspects of Schools

* What were the aspects of the chosen school that were positive?
* What were the aspects of the chosen school that were negative?
* What were the aspects of non-chosen schools that were positive?
* What were the aspects of non-chosen schools that were negative?

Awareness of Laws

* What is your awareness of laws and history around transgender students in education?
* What is your perceived awareness of laws and history around transgender students in education of teachers, administration, students, and parents?

Important Factors in Schools

* What were the most important factors that caused you to not choose other schools?
* Of what we discussed, what were the most important factors for you in deciding which school for your child to attend?
* What advice about transgender students/families do you have for:

Teachers?

Administration?

Students?

Parents?

Community?

Families who may not support transgender/LGB students in education?