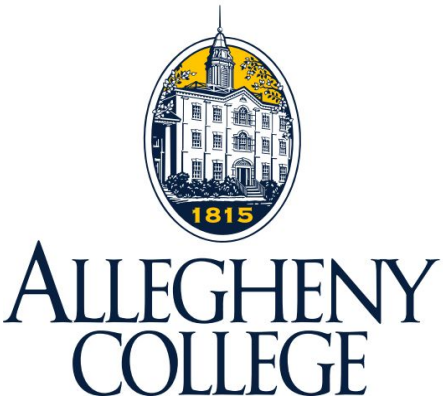
Transformative Narratives:

An Analysis of the Construction of Trans childhood health narratives cultivated by popular Youtube content creators



Senior Comprehensive Project

in partial fulfillment of

Bachelor of Science Degree

Global Health Studies

May 2019

Hope Christina Albert

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An Analysis of the Construction of Trans childhood health narratives cultivated by popular Youtube content creators

May 2018

Hope Christina Albert

This work represents my own work unless otherwise cited.

This senior comprehensive project has met the minimum requirements
of the Global Health Studies
major for a Bachelor of Science degree

Dr. Vesta Silva	Dr. Pamela Runestad
DATE	DATE

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ABSTRACT

Name: *Hope Christina Albert*

Graduation Date: *May 2019*

Title: *Transformative Narratives: An Analysis of the Construction of Trans childhood health narratives cultivated by Popular Youtube content creators*

First Reader: *Dr. Vesta Silva*

Second Reader: *Dr. Pamela Runestad*

Within the United States and many Westernized cultures, gender and sex are viewed dichotomously. Gender roles and social expectations are deeply embedded in various systemic institutions. As a consequence, transgender individuals are subject to stigma and discrimination at individual, interpersonal, and structural levels. Recently, gender identity is being questioned at younger ages, yet there is a significant lack of research dedicated to the vulnerable demographic of the trans youth. Many trans individuals take to the video streaming platform, Youtube, to document their experiences with the social and medical obstacles associated with transition. This viral community serves as a way to share information, advice, opinions, and experiences gained by identifying as transgender in the United States. With views and subscribers soaring into the millions, it is safe to say their video content is attracting a large audience. Although transitioning does not require full medical transition, the narratives analyzed in this project suggest otherwise. This project identifies a normative narrative in which Youtube trans youth personalities emphasize the need for medical interventions, and construct their audience as trans individuals who also desire permanent body change through medical means. As a result, this viral community reinforces existing gender norms and reestablishes a relationship between one's body and gender identity.

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Introduction:

In the United States and many Westernized cultures, gender is evaluated based on culturally accepted binary standards of identity, typically confined to either male or female classifications. Official government documents, such as birth certificates, school records, and drivers' licenses, place an emphasis on gender as an identifying marker of identity. In congruence with dichotomous views of sex and gender established within Western culture, gender roles and gender expectations have become heavily embedded within our society. As a direct consequence of these societal views, individuals who disturb the boundaries of gender expectations in the United States are subject to stigma and discrimination cultivated at individual, interpersonal, and structural levels. In turn, transgender individuals are dealt a stigmatized, social identity; an identity which introduces a plethora of health risks, social repercussions, and chronic disease trends among the demographic. As gender identity is being questioned at younger ages, transgender individuals under the age of 18 face particularly challenging obstacles when claiming their deemed "divergent" gender identity.

Although identifying these particular challenges can be incredibly difficult due to the lack of information available on this vulnerable demographic, utilizing individual narratives can be helpful in gaining insight into their shared lived experiences. By employing the video sharing platform, Youtube, as a method of studying trans childhood health narratives, the stories belonging to this marginalized demographic can be shared and interpreted in a variety of ways that would not be possible without the first hand experiences offered via video streaming sites. While documentaries and interviews discuss gender related issues from a third party point of

view, Youtube personalities are able to identify and respond to the experiences they are personally undergoing.

Moreover, these personal experiences are particularly crucial when identifying common themes among trans childhood narratives because they articulate how an individual's gender identity can affect the state of their overall health. Health is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as the "state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (2017). In other words, health can be affected by every experience an individual has in life, and can be particularly damaged when an individual belongs to a stigmatized community. Trans youth have the ability to promote conversation, share information, and cultivate a community by sharing their personal experiences on their Youtube channels. By using their own language and being open with their experiences, trans youth Youtubers are able to offer an arsenal of medical information and social advice to their community comprised of transgender and cisgender viewers alike.

Although there are many positive aspects associated with the trans youth Youtube community, the narratives analyzed in this project have cultivated a normative narrative in which physical transformation is constructed as desirable among the demographic. This is important to note because not every individual's transition narrative will progress similarly. Specifically, transgender individuals do not always desire or have access to medical interventions that will alter the physical state of their body to reflect their gender identity. In other words, although physical transitioning is not necessary in every individual's transitioning process, individuals may experience communal pressure to seek medical interventions.

The purpose of my senior comprehensive project was to identify and analyze the common themes among trans childhood health narratives, articulated by transgender Youtube personalities under the age of 18 in the United States. By doing so, I was able to explore a viral community of like minded individuals that share similar health barriers, lived experiences, and social identities. Additionally, I was able to contextualize the effects of gender divergence in a western society that is not accepting of identities that move beyond society's standard form of the male and female body. By analyzing Youtube narratives such as these, I was able to identify a recurring emphasis placed on transformative medical interventions, and the need for the physical body to reflect an individual's gender identity. In essence, Youtube content creators construct their audience as trans youth individuals who intend to seek medical interventions in an effort for their bodies to appear in accordance with culturally accepted notions of body and gender.

Methods

Criteria:

In order to analyze trans childhood narratives, I set specific guidelines to aid in determining which Youtube personalities were included in this project. To begin, each individual had to begin the transition process, and the documentation of their transition process on Youtube before the age of 18. Each Youtube personality included in this study ranged from the ages of 14 to 18. Additionally, in order to fit in to the criteria of "micro celebrity", each Youtube personality selected for this analysis must have over 10,000 subscribers to their individual channels.

Since there are transgender Youtubers that specialize in different topics of life, such as gaming or crafting, the personalities in this review had to discuss transgender issues in a variety of their videos. In other words, the majority of their content must be in reference to personal issues stemming from their gender identity or trans issues in general. Finally, each Youtube personality must live in the United States in order to contextualize gender identity in congruence with the context of a westernized society.

Users Selected:

The following ten Youtube micro-celebrities were chosen for analysis in this project:

Users	**Age**	**Subscribers**	**Views**	**Trans Status**	**Year Joined**
Jazz Jennings	17	588,918	24,736,205	MTF	2013
Ashton Daniel	Under 18	16,687	1,214,061	FTM	2015
MilesChronicles	18	1,132,516	137,231,715	FTM	2012
ChandlerNWilson	18	352,000	59,842,848	FTA	2010
Justin Blake	Under 18	497,090	13,987,387	FTM	2015
Sam Collins	Under 18	338,008	25,923,103	FTM	2012
NickCamryn	Under 18	118,049	1,864,221	FTM	2014
Storm Ryan	18	252,035	11,230,918	FTM	2014
Ryan Jacobs Flores	18	95,840	6,245,227	FTM	2014
Max Aaron	16	39,480	683,696	FTM	2013

Literature Review:

Although there is limited formal research focused primarily on the discourse of trans youth health, there are many theories that aid in understanding the context of trans childhood narratives and the effects of their presence among the Youtube community. This literature review will focus primarily on the following two divisions of information: *Gender Identity* and *Youtube*. Overall, a review of this literature will include theories relating to gender identity and the online community of Youtube within the United States. This literature review will be restricted to the 3 following themes under the construction of gender: *Sex and Gender, Performance of Gender,* and *the Social Implications of Transgender Identity*. Similarly, the 3 recurring themes among Youtube literature that this literature review will focus on are *Micro Celebrities, Narratives,* and *Creating an Online Community*. These theories are applicable to a variety of contexts, however, this literature review will focus on material with reference to trans children in the United States, and the expression of identity through narratives grounded in online communities, with a particular focus on Youtube discourse.

Construction of Gender

In the United States, there are many contributing factors that play a role in the construction of one's gender identity. The construction of sex and gender can be influenced by a variety of institutionalized factors such as the media, culture, interpersonal relationships, and societal 'norms'. It is suggested that gender is a social identity that primarily serves as an critical organization factor among all societies (Gagne & Tewksbury, 1998). In other words, gender is rooted within an institutionalized system that is fundamentally created to restrict people into one of two categories: man or woman (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004).

Sex and Gender

Although past rhetoric suggests that an individual's sex correlates significantly with their gender identity, certain scholars continue to suggest otherwise. The terms 'sex' and 'gender' are often used interchangeably in the United States, however, academic scholars are frequently bringing light to the differences between the two forms of social categorization. To begin, some scholars suggest that sex is considered a natural process or a biological based identity (Muehlenhard & Peterson, 2011; Bradley, 2007), whereas gender is defined as a social "phenomena" cultivated through both societal and cultural influences (Muehlenhard & Peterson, 2011; Ortner & Whitehead, 1981; Bradley, 2007; Hird, 2000; Hines & Sanger, 2010). In other words, Muehlenhard and Peterson maintain that "biological sex is the foundation on which gender is socially constructed" (2011). In turn, these theorists cultivate a nature versus culture narrative, in which sex is considered natural and gender is considered to be molded by outside cultural influences. These themes are an active influence in trans identity, where individuals are given their assigned identity through sex, but cultivate their gender identity through accepted forms of gender roles (Hines & Sanger, 2010).

Additionally, Ridgeway and Correll argue that the process by which we label another as 'male' or 'female' is so fundamental in defining self as a relation to another, that the majority of people assume sex categorization is natural when it is in fact not free from the constraints of the United States' cultural biases (2004). Their studies suggest that as we categorize others as male or female, we simultaneously characterize ourselves as similar or different (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). In other words, the process of sex classification is significantly socially constructed, and automatically activates gender stereotypes among individuals, which spreads throughout

societies. In addition, Hird argues against the idea that sex is deeply connected with nature, suggesting instead that the sex/gender binary is "particularly reductive for intersexuals" and bring about "very real political, social, and personal implications" (2000). To clarify, Hird (2000) argues that defining sex as a natural process introduces a plethora of social consequences for individuals who do not categorize themselves strictly by their assigned sex, which will be discussed further in the next section of this literature review.

Moreover, Hird also claims that the "sex/gender binary" is too closely tied to biology, and the presence of an individual's reproductive organs should not be the defining factor of a person's sex (2000). Hird further explains that there are many variations of sex, however, in western societies such as the United States, we only habitually recognize sex as male or female (2000). For instance, Hird states, "bodies are important, and certainly 'material', but not necessarily in ways that justify continued emphasis on sexual difference" (2000). In "Transgender Identities: Towards a social analysis of gender", Hines and Sanger suggest that assuming sex as a biological marker of identity further perpetuates the "relationship between social roles and the status that a particular form of body is expected to occupy" (2010). To elaborate, Hines and Sanger claim that defining sex as a marker of identity further amplifies the social expectations of gender performances. Additionally, anthropologists Ortner and Whitehead, assert that the idea of the biological or sexual dichotomy that theorists such as Muehlenhard & Peterson advocate for is actually "a product of our gender ideology than the reverse" (1981). In other words, Ortner and Whitehead believe that due to the prescribed binary notion of gender in western society, sex is simply defined as male or female as an afterthought of how the United States views gender as a whole.

Overall, Ridgeway & Correll (2004), Hines & Stagner (2010), Ortner & Whitehead (1981) and Hird (2000) argue that sex is socially influenced, and not completely reliant on biological factors like other theorists would claim. Furthermore, their theories suggest that considering sex as a natural process instead of a culturally constructed identity like gender, restricts individuals and places an overemphasis on the role of the body in social identity. Similarly, many modern feminist theorists, such as Judith Butler, see almost no difference between the two, instead suggesting that sex and gender are interchangeable, and can be created similarly through repetitive performativity of gender in the daily life (2008). However, Bradley (2007) suggests that this ideology of combining biology and social influences is dangerous. Instead, Bradley chooses to define gender as something separate from sex where an individual is born and given a male or female identity, but becomes a man or women through social interactions with a "set of cultural understandings about femininity and masculinity" (2007). Either way, it is clear that the definitions of gender and sex do not have definitive distinctions, which further questions the cultural relationship between body and identity in the United States.

As stated earlier, Ridgeway and Correll define gender as an institutionalized system of social practices used for categorizing individuals (2004). Their research further asserts that gender beliefs, social structure, and social relation contexts, or situations in which an individual must define their identity, are influential factors that maintain the current binary system of gender (2004). In relation, Ortner and Whitehead suggest that the gender system is a "symbolic system that consists of two mutually exclusive categories in which all humans are placed" (1981). In turn, this defines sex and gender as systematic practices of the organization of individuals among a shared culture. Additionally, Ortner and Whitehead establish that this

system of gender is hierarchically arranged by favoring masculine characteristics over feminine attributes (1981). As a consequence, the gender system forces individuals to act out their gender in order to reassert their gender identity (Hines & Sanger, 2010; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004), which is discussed in the following sub-section.

Performance of Gender

As seen through the literature of gender and sex, the current gender system reinforces sex and gender roles within society. Scholars are reestablishing the idea that certain genders act in particular manners due to the dichotomous views of gender which are present most notably in Western societies such as in the United States. Ortner and Whitehead suggest that sex roles are the "differential participation of men and women in social, economic, political, and religious institutions" (1981). Another definition of gender roles introduced by Blackstone (2003), states that gender roles are the product of interactions between individuals and their environments. In summary, gender roles are heavily influenced by society and the cultural factors of a community. Blackstone suggests that "appropriate gender roles are defined according to society's beliefs about differences between the sexes" (2003). As stated previously, Ortner and Whitehead suggest that the gender system favors masculine traits over feminine qualities (1981). As a consequence, men are defined in terms of their "status and role" in society, while women are typically defined by their relationships (Ortner & Whitehead, 1981). The significance of this difference is important to note as this further reinforces already established gender stereotypes, and societal "norms" that are particularly influential within Western cultures. For instance, Blackstone reiterates that traditionally, women are seen as more nurturing individuals than men, while men are considered to be the leaders (2003). As a direct consequence, women are

frequently known to becoming stay at home caretakers, while men typically contribute labor in society and provide financially for the household (Blackstone, 2003; Westbrook & Schilt, 2014). In other words, these gender expectations further constrict individual behavior and encourage individuals to act accordingly with their assigned gender.

With the notion of sex being socially constructed and culturally influenced in mind (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Hines & Stagner, 2010; Ortner & Whitehead, 1981; and Hird, 2000), Ridgeway and Correll suggest that as an individual classifies the sex of another individual, they carefully construct the way they personally appear and behave in order to agree with the standardized gender roles of their society they are using to judge another (2004). Western societies are typically grounded in hegemonic beliefs, and their institutions consequently reflect these ideologies. Therefore, an individual in the United States will use western influences to construct their standard gender roles and reflect these rules in their own behavior. In turn, these set rules are used to judge another's gender identity and their adherence to societal standards. Ridgeway and Correll further suggests that due to these hegemonic beliefs, individuals subconsciously comply with the pressures of "gender based expectations in the bulk of their behavior" (2004). These standard expectations affect behavior and the judgement of individuals, especially in public settings when another individual's behavior deviates from these expected gender roles. Ridgeway and Correll show that gender is more so something one does, rather than something one is (2004).

Similarly, theorists suggest that gendered roles are not only imposed upon an individual, but are also ingrained behaviors which individuals continue to recreate and reinforce daily (Bradley, 2007; Unger, 1989; Ortner & Whitehead 1981; Ridgeway & Corell, 2004). For

instance, Bradley (2007) emphasizes how much effort the typical woman puts into the daily creation of the *feminine* body. In order to appear feminine, women are presenting themselves as such through their daily behaviors, including the use of makeup, hairstyle changes, wearing high heels, shaving bodily hair, and improving skin tone through the use of popular skin products (2007). On the other hand, Bradley suggests that males must physically appear superior to women by enhancing their masculinity, and participating in sports and rigorous gym routines (2007). Bradley elaborates by defining this process as "gendering", which is able to operate at three significant levels: micro (individual), meso (institutional), and macro (societal) (2007). These levels are important to note as gendered roles are affecting individual behaviors, institutional operations, and societal expectations, and these three levels act in accordance with one another.

The social process of determining one's gender identity is defined as "determining gender", which is a direct response to "doing gender" or "gendering" within Western societies (Westbrook & Schilt, 2014; Bradley, 2007). As an individual performs their assigned gender roles, society judges their performance based on western influenced gender standards and stereotypes. According to Westbrook & Schilt, this relationship is reinforced by the need of "a person's gender to be authenticated by other people" (2014). As a result, not only does an individual need to perform their gender identity, they also need to do so *convincingly*.

Social Implications of Trans Identity

As shown through culturally cultivated gender roles, there are a set of default expectations individuals are expected to follow in order to identify as being male or female in the United States. Due to gender's heavily socially constructed nature, Ridgeway and Correll admit

that people usually unknowingly comply with these roles (2004) in their day to day lives. Ridgeway and Correll suggest that these gender expectations affect behavior and biased judgement on self and others (2004). This behavior of judgement is amplified when an individual does not perform their assigned gender, or does not do so convincingly. Gagne and Tewksbury (1998) explore the social implications of identifying as transgender, stating that when trans individuals do not conform to the culture's defined standards of gender identity, there are many social implications. These social implications include risking their physical safety and safety from verbal harassment, becoming more vulnerable to violence, and being more likely to suffer economically (1998). Gagne and Tewksbury assert that in order to be accepted in western societies, transgender individuals need to conform to gender roles and performance (1998). In addition, Gagne and Tewksbury suggest that many trans individuals are forced to "learn to accept rejection, stigmatization, and the loss of relationship if they violate gender norms"(1998), and as a result, individuals are often forced to repress their "authentic" identity. Scholar Viviane Namaste suggests that transgender individuals are forced to fight for their rights and equality against systemic and institutional practices that marginalize transsexual and transgendered lives, putting an emphasis on the discourse of transgender activism (2000). Namaste continues her research in transgender politics, where often times transgenders and transsexuals do not have access to quality health care, even with legal employment, and are not included in anti-discrimination legislation in the United States (2005). In addition, Levitt and Ippolito (2014) suggests that there is an early childhood occurance of harassment among transgender individuals, having to face invalidation among their peers, and feel stigmatized when out in public. Due to these social implications, many trans people face a moral dilemma: challenge gender stereotypes

and gender roles or conform to them in order to "pass" and avoid repercussions such as the before mentioned social implications (Gagne & Tewksbury, 1998).

Youtube

As Youtube becomes increasingly more popular, social media influencers are beginning to create a self brand that targets online media sources in order to reach a large, targeted population. Self-branding is defined as individuals who develop a distinctive public image for "personal or commercial gain", or "cultural capital" by Khamis, Ang, and Welling (2016). To elaborate, this literature suggests that these individuals are able to sell their self brand from a specific selling point: a public identity that fits "the needs or interests of a targeted audience" (Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2016). For instance, Youtube is a primary source for how-to videos, makeup tutorials, and various gaming vlogs. However, individuals must actively seek out these videos in an attempt to gain more resources on their chosen interests or topics. Khamis, Ang, and Welling suggest that as a result, Youtube is considered a consumer-centric space, where users can perform and sell their personal brand for an intended audience (2016). In other words, a consumer must specifically seek out their intended product, or within Youtube discourse, consumers must actively search Youtube to cater to their interests.

Microcelebrity and Self branding

Theorist, Theresa Senft, argues that micro-celebrity is defined by the ability to produce a public version of one's self through social media practices and online streaming communities (2008). Accordingly, Marwick asserts that microcelebrity is a process of communication, and involves "the presentation of oneself as a celebrity" (2012). In addition, Khamis, Ang, and Welling suggest that "micro-celebrity" is an intentional set of practices that allow insight into

one's personal life (2016). In summary, individuals allow the viewers to see the intended product, but not necessarily the authentic life. Marwick defines this performance as presenting and being viewed as a public persona: micro celebrities use strategic intimacy to appeal to their audience and regard their followers as their fans (2012). Either way, these theories suggest that micro celebrities cultivate their identity and communicate or perform their intended self for public audiences (Senft, 2008; Marwick, 2012; Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2016).

Micro-celebrities commonly approach self branding by strategically creating an audience with the intention to attain celebrity status (Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2016). These researchers suggest that individuals must approach their social media platform with the intention of becoming a celebrity, and must follow designated practices associated with micro celebrities. Wernick suggests that Youtubers are the focus of internet celebrities (1991) and serve as excellent examples of self branding as a performance of identity. In turn, it is clear that Youtube has the appropriate climate to cultivate flourishing communities of micro celebrities. In fact, Jerslev (2016) and Wernick (1991) both suggest these performances of a private authentic self are the most valuable commodity in social media celebrification. In doing so, Jerslev (2016) suggests that vloggers, or video bloggers, are able to self brand with narratives that cultivate intimate relationships between the individual and their viewers. In turn, vloggers are able to present an authentic self to viewers, which may result in authentic relationships among the online community. Moreover, Jerslev reiterates that vloggers display their authentic self through "straight to camera communication", where they are not only addressing their viewers, but are also addressing self through the process of filming and editing (2016). As a result, individuals are able to project a version of their private self to their intended audience in, what viewers are

lead to believe to be an authentic manner (Jerslev, 2016; Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2016; Wernick, 1991, Senft, 2008).

The Use of Narratives

Scholars Russell, Tong, and Hung-Yen, suggest that narrative advertising involves "storytelling or communicating a lived experience that unfolds in a sequence of events, conveys the storyteller's reactions to the events, describes the location and time, and captivates the audience" (2013). In relation, vloggers commonly use narratives to construct their authentic self, allowing viewers to relate to their persona and lived experiences through their use of personal storytelling. Narratives correctly used can aid the self branding process tremendously (Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2016). According to Khamis, Ang, & Welling, this is suggested to be due to self narratives being deeply rooted in the emotive pull of an effective self brand. As previously stated, narrative and micro celebrities are closely related; Khamis, Ang & Welling assert that compelling narratives can attract large audiences for multiple identifying reasons such as being inspirational, relatable, cautionary, etc. (2016). Russell, Tong, and Hung-Yen suggest that narrative use is a form of advertising, which is "processed through appeals to viewer's subjective feelings and empathy" (2013). This further suggests that viewers are using vlogger's narratives to construct "self-relevant scenarios" (2013). In other words, an individual can relate to the vlogger on a personal level based off shared experiences. Dan Padgett and Douglas Allen (2013) suggest that based on narrative theory, people relate their interpretations of experience to others by narrating, or telling stories. This insight suggests that Vloggers and their viewers are gaining different interpretations of the same lived in experience, creating a relationship based on that shared experience in an online community.

In addition, Khamis, Ang, and Welling suggest that narratives are extremely self driven (2016), and highly motivated by self-mediation. Khamis, Ang, and Welling suggest that self-mediation is a specific type of identity construction, typically constructed through social media where individuals can create a "highly curated" version of how they want to be seen (2016). In other words, these "highly curated" narratives play an important role in presenting oneself as authentic online. On the other hand, Marwick (2012) suggests that micro-celebrity's focus on authenticity is not always viewed positively, and when an "inauthentic" person is revealed, the community can be very hostile. Marwick continues to to suggest that when internet micro-celebrities are revealed to be "normal" people, their fans can experience "intense disappointment" (2012).

Creating a Community

Similar to other social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, Youtube has the ability to create a community among its users which differs significantly from many other types of online networks (Burton et. al, 2012). Burton et. al concludes that in many ways, social media networks differ from computer networks because social media networks are completely composed of online communities (2012). Rotman and Preece suggest the following factors define a sense of online community: "a shared purpose or common interests, participants' interaction, user-generated content, the existence of clear boundaries that define the purpose and practices of the community, and a unique communal culture" (2010).

As stated previously, Khamis, Ang & Welling assert that personal narratives can attract viewers because it emphasizes identifying factors such as "being relatable" (2016). Cunningham and Craig (2017) agree with Khamis, Ang, & Welling's claim of relatability, suggesting that the

authenticity of vlogs and various social media platforms cultivate relationships among the creator and their community of fans. Marwick further suggests that micro-celebrity interactions with their audience typically reveals personal details about their lives, making them appear to seem less regulated than film or television celebrities (2015). Cunningham and Craig's theory further states that the creator's claim to authenticity drives the creation of these communities in which the creator is constantly being validated by fan and subscriber responses (2017). Similarly, Burton et. al. explains that blogs and vlogs typically allow readers to interact with the content through comments and subscriptions. In doing so, these videos "hold the potential to facilitate the development of interpersonal relationships and a sense of community" among creators and their followers (2012).

Marwick investigated the clear shift from consumption to participation in social media platforms such as Youtube (2015). Marwick suggests that people interpret media products differently, and apply the products to the context of their personal lives (2015). Since individuals have a personal connection to the media, people are more likely to draw from media text to create their own products. Marwick (2015) mentions new media theorists such as Baym (2000), who suggest that "fannish" activity online can lead to building a well connected community and emphasizes creative activity overall. To summarize her theory, Baym concludes that audiences appropriate the "affordances of the internet in order to build communities that are based on shared practices and meanings" (2000). In addition, Rotman and Preece (2010) that the intercommunity culture of online communities such as Youtube provide a framework for understanding, interacting, and communicating with one another. By creating this framework, users are able to "inspire a sense of belonging" among their community (Rotman & Preece,

2010). Burgess and Green suggest "the cultural logistics of community, openness, and authenticity are embedded in the Youtube platform and brand at all scales of commerciality" (2018). In other words, Burgess and Green refer to Youtube as a "participatory community", where content creators and viewers can interact with one another and create a community based of their shared dialogues, interests, and identities.

Context:

Effects of a Stigmatized Identity:

In summary, identifying as transgender in the United States is difficult. As previously discussed, gender roles that correspond to an individual's birth sex are heavily valued by the majority of the population. Although it is more productive to understand gender as a fluid, social process rather than associating gender with the anatomy of an individual, the majority of citizens of the United States continue to believe otherwise. A recent study showed that 54% of Americans believe being a man or woman is determined by the sex they were assigned at birth (Brown, 2017). As such, many transgender individuals who either do not adhere to conventional gender roles, or cross the boundaries of their assigned gender face a plethora of social and physical repercussions.

Thinking of gender as a binary construct rather than a spectrum, punishes those who cross the boundaries of gender "norms" by creating stigmatized identities. The United States standard ideology of gender fuels transphobia at both systemic and individual levels. For instance, transphobic ideals can manifest in violence; within the first 6 months of 2017, 28 transgender people were "fatally shot or killed by other violent means" (Human Rights Campaign, 2017). In addition, by November of 2018, 26 transgender people were also killed

through violent means (Human Rights Campaign, 2018). A trend of violence and discrimination towards the transgender community further pushes individuals into stigmatized hiding. As a result, stigmatized individuals can be less likely to be open about their feelings, may become depressed or suicidal, or even act out in violence.

Societal influences play a direct role in the mental and physical well being of stigmatized identities. Due to transphobia being present in a large portion of people in the United States, it is reflected in a plethora of systematic institutions such as federal policies, the economy, media representation, education, and healthcare accessibility. These concepts are important to gain insight into the discourse surrounding the health narratives of transyouth in the United States. By contextualizing the societal and political environment trans youths are being exposed to, it will allow for a better understanding on how these structures play a role in the health of an individual.

Federal and State Level Policies

The stigmatization of trans bodies is further reflected in American policies that rarely protect the rights of transgender individuals. Within the past ten years, rights for the transgender individual have increased dramatically; however, individuals continue to be discriminated against when their gender identity does not match their birth sex, or when they are perceived to not perform accordingly to conventional gender stereotypes. Currently, there is no federal law that prohibits discrimination based on gender identity (NCLR, 2010) in employment or public accommodations such as restrooms or changing facilities. However, Congress has enacted certain protections against hate crimes based on an individual's gender identity, and some protections are gained under federal sex-discrimination laws, also known as Title VII (NCLR, 2010). Individual states do have the ability to enact gender discrimination policies, however only

a small minority of states have done so. Fifteen states and the District of Columbia have passed laws that fundamentally offer explicit protections for transgender people by prohibiting discrimination based on "transgender status, gender identity, or gender expression" (NCLR, 2010).

In recent years, bathroom bills have been introduced to a plethora of states that would ultimately "restrict access to multi user restrooms, locker rooms, and other sex-segregated facilities on the basis of a definition of sex or gender consistent with sex assigned at birth or 'biological sex'" (NCSL, 2017). While North Carolina is the only state to pass this type of legislation, at least 24 other states have current legislation pending or have considered adopting their own bathroom bills in their legislature. In March of 2017, North Carolina passed a law that required people to use public restrooms that corresponds with the sex written on their birth certificate. This bathroom bill explicitly restricts a transgender individual's access to public restrooms that correspond with their gender identity. As a result, many transgender people are "traumatised and endangered by victimization and harassment" (Dart, 2017) when they are forced to use the bathroom not of their gender identity.

However, discriminatory laws against the transgender community do not ultimately stop at the state level. Recently, the Supreme Court has passed the Trump Administration's transgender military ban, in which individuals who have been diagnosed with gender dysphoria are not allowed to serve in the military. The ban further states that individuals without the condition are able to serve, however they can only do so according to the sex they were assigned at birth. As a direct result, the majority of transgender people are now disqualified from military

services. This ban and the aforementioned bathroom bills, fundamentally serve as another way for our society to systematically discriminate against transgender individuals.

Health Trends of the Transgender Community

The transgender community is vulnerable to a plethora of adverse health outcomes such as depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, substance abuse, and HIV (White Hughto et. al., 2015). Stigma plays a crucial role in these adverse health trends as it directly induces stress, a key factor in the morbidity and mortality trends of the population (White Hughto et. al., 2015). Additionally, discrimination indirectly affects transgender people's health by restricting access to health protective resources such as knowledge, money, power, and preventative health care. Due to stigma and the fear of discrimination, one in five transgender people have postponed or did not attempt to access health care within the past year (AMSA, 2017).

Additionally, perceived stigma may prevent transgender patients from disclosing their gender identity to their healthcare provider, which deprives the provider from information that may be crucial to their diagnosis. Compared to their cisgender counterparts, transgender patients may be more likely to delay seeking preventive health services such as a papanicolaou test or prostate cancer screening, which may increase their risk of late stage diagnosis and poor health outcomes. Moreover, it is not uncommon for transgender persons to be denied care based on their gender identity. Accordingly, 10 percent of transgender people said they have been personally discriminated against in a medical setting when going to their primary care doctor or a local clinic (Landman, 2018).

Moreover, if a transgender person did seek care despite fear of social repercussions, there is a limited availability in trained health care professionals that are aware or specialize in

transgender health. The majority of transgenders would agree that healthcare providers need to be more educated about their common health issues and how they are to be treated (Daaleman, 2018). As a result, approximately 29 percent of transgenders report having to teach their health care provider about common transgender health issues (AMSA, 2017). In addition, to make access increasingly more difficult, the available healthcare professionals that specialize in transgender health are hardly ever covered under private insurance.

Medical Practices Among Trans Youth:

In a recent study, it is estimated that 0.7% of youths, or about 150,000 individuals, ages 13 to 17 identify as transgender within the United States (Herman et al., 2017). As seen through the social implications of being transgender in the United States, transitioning is a social process, one that requires offsetting the idea of gender as a binary variable; however, it can be a medical process as well. Recognizing the medications and treatments transgender children are exposed to will provide a more thorough understanding in transgender health narratives. As developing medical practices designed to aid trans children in transition surface rapidly, there are concerns of unknown side effects and possible regret after permanent changes arise.

Puberty Blockers

One of the more recent medical practices is the use of puberty blocker medication to "suppress the body's production of estrogen or testosterone, essentially pausing the changes that would occur during puberty" (Boghani, 2015). Possible benefits of using puberty blocking medications is that they delay hormone-induced biological changes, "such as vocal chord changes, the development of breast tissue or changes in facial structure, that are irreversible and

can be especially distressing to children who are gender-non conforming or transgender" (Boghani, 2015).

Initially, puberty blockers were prescribed to children who started puberty at a very young age, typically before the age of 8 or 9. Although the medications are safe and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved for this particular medical diagnosis, its use in treating trans children is relatively new and considered 'off-label'. Since the medication was never FDA approved for trans children, doctors revealed that they are very concerned "about how long children stay on the medication because there isn't enough research into the effects of stalling puberty at the age when children normally go through it" (Boghani, 2015). Moreover, doctors worry about a child's neurological development and bone growth, where both estrogen and testosterone, the hormones that are blocked by these medications, play an active role in these natural processes.

Hormone Therapy

As discussed, puberty blockers are not intended for long term use. However, for children who desire to continue with their physical transition, they may begin to take hormones corresponding with their gender identity. Transgender females who desire physical transition will want to use estrogen to develop female sex characteristics. Similarly, transgender males may want to use testosterone to develop male sex characteristics. The purpose of estrogen and testosterone injections in the transgender community, also known as transgender endocrine therapy or HRT, "is to change secondary sex characteristics to reduce gender dysphoria and/or facilitate gender presentation that is consistent with the felt sense of self" (Dahl et al., 2008).

Once a child begins taking hormones, the body will begin to make irreversible changes, a concept very different from taking puberty blockers.

While puberty blockers "pause" changes, hormone therapy drives changes in the body--creating more concern among parents and doctors about at what age children should begin hormone treatment. Studies on the adult transgender community suggest that "endocrine therapy must be individualized based on the patient's goals, the risk/benefit ratio of medications, the presence of other medical conditions, and consideration of social and economic issues" (Dahl et al., 2008). The *Endocrine Society's* guidelines suggest 16, however more children are starting cross-sex hormone treatment earlier at the ages of 13 or 14 (Boghani, 2015). The idea of an individualized approach is being utilized between doctors, their patients, and the patient's parents. The point of time where children begin cross-sex hormones is heavily reliant on "the child's readiness and stability in their gender identity" (Boghani, 2015). The child, their parents, their therapists, and their doctor, must all agree that the child is mentally and emotionally ready to go through the process of cross-sex hormone therapy.

Youtube:

Youtube, a video sharing platform where users can watch, like, share, comment, and upload content, was founded in 2005. The company has grown to become one of the most popular video sharing sites on the Internet with over 1. 8 billion users logging on every month (Gilbert, 2018). With over 300 hours of video content being uploaded every minute (Gilbert, 2018), Youtube is quickly gaining information for every particular interest.

In addition to video streaming, Youtube has a business model in which individuals can create lucrative markets to self promote their image or "brand". By doing so, video bloggers sell

their personalities and lifestyles by forging genuine relationships with their viewers. Individuals have followers that range from the single digits to upwards of 70 million subscribers. Vloggers that have followers in the many thousands are able to reach a large range of audiences, selling their image in such a way that defines them as *micro celebrities*. Khamis, Ang, and Welling suggest that micro celebrities are "fame-seekers who lack both a strong public identity and the resources to self-promote on the scale of an established celebrity" (2016). Micro celebrities are typically self-crafted, and forged on different forms of social media. On Youtube, micro celebrities craft ideal versions of themselves on their channels without taking away from the genuine nature vlogs are typically accredited with through the process of self-branding. In other words, "self-branding through social media pivots on attention and narrative, yet significantly extends the potential for fame and celebrity" (Khamis, Ang, and Welling, 2016). Vlogger's channel page is crafted to suit both the creator and their viewers. The pages consist of a biography, the creator's videos, their playlists, and are, more often than not, linked to their personal social media accounts. By promoting their self identity through social media sites and through video content, individuals gain limited fame from their many followers.

In order to promote open communication within virtual communities, vloggers speak to their viewers directly through the camera, and viewers are able to respond to both the video creator and to other viewers in the comment section of the video. In other words, "this collaborative, dialogic space facilitates self-branding as attention-seeking users produce a public persona that is targeted and strategic" (Khamis, Ang, and Welling, 2016) Typically, these virtual relationships are created through shared interests or identities which create compelling narratives. According to Khamis, Ang, and Welling, "compelling narratives potentially attract

audiences for multiple reasons - they could be inspirational, relatable, instructive, cautionary, and so on" (2016). Youtube is a consumer centric space, where individuals need to seek out their product in accordance with their own self interests and identity.

Within the transgender community, vlogging is used as a method to share their lived experiences. By cultivating their identity and being honest with their struggles, viewers are able to relate to vloggers, and further nurture the idea of a shared, virtual community. In addition, viewers who seek information on transitioning, both socially and medically, may find themselves using video blogs as a primary source. Most documentaries on transgender individuals are created by cisgender people. However, by viewing video content on Youtube, viewers are able to engage with content created by transgender individuals telling their own narratives, rather than having outside individuals speaking for them. Narratives are constantly being constructed and changed in accordance with the content creators' lives and self mediation.

Analysis*:*

Creating a Trans Youth Normative Narrative

Trans childhood video channels not only serve as a way to cultivate a supportive community, but to also distribute information to both cisgender and transgender individuals alike. Within the transgender community, content creators will offer information on medical practices in reference to physical transitioning, and advice on how to approach the social obstacles stemming from their gender identity. For cisgender individuals, the videos serve as an important insight into trans childhood discourse and promotes overall exposure to this demographic.

By analyzing the information being offered, there is a narrative being identified among the Youtube community which is demonstrated through which aspects of information are being significantly highlighted through the content on the selected channels. This normative narrative is being cultivated by the prioritization of medical interventions and practices that encourage "passing". By emphasizing the importance of physical change during the transitioning process, it cultivates a transformative narrative in which individuals who pursue medical interventions are desirable and taking the correct route to completing their transition process. Specifically, by placing an emphasis on medical interventions, it adds value to the importance of one's gender identity being reflected onto the physical body.

Emphasizing Medical Practices:

To begin, transitioning can be a social and medical process, however both routes bring about their own set of systemic barriers. As discussed earlier in the context section, individuals under the age of 18 must have parental consent to pursue the medical methods associated with transitioning such as puberty blockers, hormone therapy injections, and sex confirmation surgery. Even if consent is given, it can be difficult to find a doctor that specializes in transgender health, and even fewer are knowledgeable about trans children. Although it is not uncommon for individuals to seek medical information online, social barriers such as these may be a reason for transgender children to seek alternative methods of accessing information. In essence, Youtube trans child video channels may serve as an example of how individuals should approach their transition. However, it is important to note that transitioning is an individualized process in which medical interventions are not always necessary or accessible for transgender children. To elaborate, not every transgender individual desires or prioritizes full medical

transition. As more transgender children view the Youtube content creators analyzed in this project, their own personal transition process is being compared to those of the trans youth sharing their experiences online. Due to this, a narrative is being constructed in which medical interventions are necessary for the fulfillment of one's gender identity.

Hormone Therapy

The majority of the 10 transgender Youtube personalities analyzed in this project have provided information of some nature on cross sex hormone therapy. Specifically, many individuals share their personal experiences with testosterone or estrogen, and the side effects they experienced from these injections. By sharing their experiences with their viewers, individuals are able to gain an understanding of the possible medical interventions they can explore. However, by emphasizing this information, Youtube personalities construct a precedence that all transgender children should be seeking cross sex hormone therapy during their transitioning process. It is clear that the majority of personalities studied in this analysis have seeked or obtained hormone injections during their transitioning process. The majority of personalities express their happiness with their hormone injections, and the effects the medication has on their bodies. Viewers are being encouraged to seek hormone injections by the positive feedback being provided by popular transgender personalities on Youtube. Consequently, individual content creators are cultivating a standard of how trans children should approach their transition. As a result, with encouragement from Youtube personalities, trans youth Youtube discourse frames medical transitioning as desirable. For instance, *Jazz Jennings*, *Ashton Daniel*, *ChandlerNWilson*, *Justin Blake*, *Storm Ryan*, and *Max Aaron* create a standard

narrative by sharing each of their experiences with cross sex hormone therapy interventions, a process which yields physical, permanent results on the body.

To begin, *Ashton Daniel* introduces his experiences with testosterone injections on his channel. Daniel specifically documents the process of injecting himself with depo testosterone in his video entitled "Testosterone injections!" (2017), specifically outlining the steps crucial in safely injecting oneself. Although a nurse will show an individual beginning testosterone or estrogen shots the proper way to inject themselves, *Ashton Daniel* provides first hand experience with the injections in language that is not littered with difficult to understand medical jargon. Daniel emphasizes the importance of sanitation during the process by washing his hands multiple times during the documentation. Specifically, Daniel shows the process of using two needles to draw and inject the testosterone, how to disinfect the injection site, and how to pinch the "outer third of the thigh" (Daniel, 2017) before injection. Daniel specifies that the process is individualized; where Daniel may take a certain dose, others watching the video may not. Although Daniel does insinuate that the process of sex hormone therapy is individualized, he focuses on the medical dose as the differentiating factor among trans youth instead of the actual choice of engaging in medical interventions. As a result, Daniel assumes that anyone watching the video blog is also desirous of medical interventions, specifically hormone therapy. Overall, Daniel documents his personal injection process, while encouraging careful and responsible behavior for all who seek testosterone injections.

At the time, Daniel had been on "t-shots" for 7 months, and had started the HRT (hormone replacement therapy) process while under the age of 18. Due to this, Ashton Daniel is able to provide information on the process of obtaining HRT as a minor. Daniel describes how

he had been going to see a therapist since his pre teen years after he tried to commit suicide Daniel was forced to switch therapists three times before finding a gender therapist that was able to suit his needs accordingly. During his therapy sessions, he discussed gender, his relationships, and his body dysphoria at length. As a result, the first step in obtaining HRT was to see a therapist for at least 6 months.

As with most medications, minors must gain parental consent, so Daniel's therapist worked with his parents to ensure they were taking the appropriate steps in moving forward with testosterone injections. In his video blog entitled "Starting HRT under 18" (2017), Daniel explains parental consent is crucial in obtaining t-shot injections because it is important to understand that the side effects are permanent, and it is a medication that Daniel will be injecting for the rest of his life. After an agreement is made between Daniel, his therapist, his doctor, and his parents that HRT is the next logical step in aiding his transition, Daniel and his parents must sign a 22 part consent form. The consent form lists every known side effect of HRT, and it took Daniel and his parents 45 minutes to read. As Daniel began injecting himself with testosterone, he was forced to get 8 different blood tests and a bone scan every 3 months to watch for unexpected side effects.

Individuals who identify as Ashton does, use Ashton's experiences as a template for their own. By reviewing his videos, other transgender children are able to understand the steps they need to take in order to obtain HRT. However, the information provided by Daniel assumes that all his viewers intend to pursue medical interventions, specifically HRT. In the instance in which children are unable to legally obtain testosterone injections, there are illegal methods commonly used throughout the transgender demographic. By mentioning the illegal routes to obtaining

HRT, he constructs the narrative that trans youths must desire medical intervention, and will explore any options necessary to getting the hormones.

In congruence with Ashton Daniel, Justin Blake is another Youtube personality that documented their experiences with testosterone injections. He uploaded "Starting T" (2016), documenting the process of him getting his first t-shot of many. Blake describes the process of deciding between the testosterone gel or shot, picking the later because it is once a week, where as the gel is applied daily. Once again, Blake only offers options as to what type of medical methods are offered rather than articulating that medical interventions are not necessarily vital in the transition process, nor do they have to be desired by every trans child. At this point, his doctor referred him to a shot clinic where he was shown how to inject his testosterone into the thigh muscle. Similar to Ashton Daniel, Blake uploaded "How I do my T Shot" (2017), which was a step by step instructional video on how to inject testosterone into the muscle. In order to document the progressive changes testosterone had on his body, he uploaded periodic videos documenting changes in his physical appearance.

During "Three Months on T", uploaded by Blake in 2016, he describes the physical changes the testosterone injections had on his body. Blake noticed the following changes: deeper voice, bushier eyebrows, more acne, change in facial structure, wider neck growth, development of an adam's apple, development of broader shoulders and bigger muscles, decreasing chest size, and growth of stomach hair. In addition to appearance changes, Blake discussed how his period stopped at 2.5 months into testosterone injections.

Blake documenting the changes he experienced with testosterone injections is important to note because although many individuals may know the possible changes, it allows for other

trans children to see the changes first hand. In addition, Blake comments how he "loves the new changes" (2016) to his body and is very happy with the process. By emphasizing his happiness with the process, viewers do not have access to the negative experiences associated with HRT or possible regret some transgender children have when taking the medication. As a result, his documentation frames injections as safe and the obvious choice to desire during transitioning.

Overall, by framing medical interventions as desirable, the Youtube personalities portray transitioning without medical interventions as less significant and desirable among trans youth. It further portrays individuals who do not seek medical interventions during their transition process as wrong or undesirable. To explain, a trans individual not seeking medical interventions to aid their transition does not fit into the normative narrative constructed by trans Youtube personalities. This notion can be damaging to trans youth who do not wish to pursue medical interventions, or do not have the financial or social means to obtain it. This mindset also further encourages medical interventions among trans youth, and may create communal pressure for those debating on whether or not to pursue medical interventions.

Sex Confirmation Surgery

Alike hormone injections, sex confirmation surgery is a popular topic among transgender Youtube personalities. For instance, *Jazz Jennings, Ashton Daniel, Justin Blake, Ryan Jacob Flores, Storm Ryan,* and *Max Aaron* discuss their experiences with a variety of top and bottom sex confirmation surgeries. Once again, the information being presented to viewers frame pursuing sex confirmation surgery as the most logical next step in a trans youth transitioning process. Additionally, nudges towards medical interventions during transition further reinforce the notion that body and gender are always interrelated.

To expand, *Jazz Jennings* offers her experiences with sex confirmation surgery in her video "Preparing for Gender Confirmation Surgery" (2018). Jennings explains that she is excited for her surgery which is one month away from the time she uploaded the video. She expresses that she decided to be open about the surgery because "education is important to both the transgender community and those outside the community" (2018). Jennings describes that she will be undergoing an experimental version of vaginoplasty, in which a special procedure will be used to "extract her peritoneal lining through the belly button and harvest that tissue to create the vaginal canal" (2018). She continues to explain that the whole experience will be documented on her TLC show, "I am Jazz", if individuals are interested in seeing the entire process.

Similarly, Ashton Daniel posted a video entitled "preparing for top surgery", where he discussed his thoughts before and after he underwent breast augmentation surgery, also known as top surgery, four months prior. He discusses everyday items he brought to aid in his recovery, the medication given to him after the surgery, and how to approach the side effects of surgery. He addresses his viewers in a manner that insinuates that the people watching this video will also undergo top surgery. Daniel constructs his audience as such by using language that specifically tells the audience how to prepare. For instance, he tells viewers what to buy to make recovery easier, and specifically states "that you shouldn't expect" (2018) the same recovery journey that he had.

Daniel speaks to his viewers by sharing his experience, but noting that everyone's experience will ultimately be different. In addition, Daniel posted numerous videos following his surgery, and the multiple surgical revisions he must have following the initial surgery. For a large portion of the video, Daniel removes his shirt to display the scars that were currently

healing. He further discusses the side effects of the surgery including sensation, scar tissue, range of motion, and pain. Overall, Daniel is sharing his experience so individuals seeking top surgery will know what to expect when they decide to undergo the same surgery. By supplying information in this manner, it cultivates the notion that all transgender children should pursue the surgery as well. Daniel specifically speaks to a constructed audience of transgender children who want to pursue sex confirmation surgery. As a result, those who do not desire medical intervention may feel unwanted or alienated for not pursuing their transition in the appropriate manner.

Much like Daniel, *Ryan Jacob Flores* documents the majority of his top surgery experiences including various recovery updates and Q&A sessions. During the Q&A video, he explains the surgery he underwent a month and a half prior (Ryan Jacob Flores, 2018). The majority of questions were very specific, and viewers were asking informational questions about how it feels, the side effects, how long the recovery period is, etc. Once again, while responding to the questions, Flores emphasizes how the surgical process is completely individualized, and how every person's experience is different. By insisting that every person's surgical process is different, Flores is constructing his audience as individuals who wish to pursue medical interventions

Moreover, Youtubers Justin Blake and Max Aaron follow a similar pattern in describing their excitement for their surgeries. Justin Blake describes his experiences in his "5 Months on T + TOP SURGERY" (2017) upload. He further documents the entire experience before and after the surgery in another upload, "After Surgery" (2017). The video shows his family and friends going to the hospital together and preparing for the surgery, insinuating that he has a strong

support system, and will not be alone during his recovery period. In Max Aaron's upload, "Thoughts Before Transition Surgery!", Max Aaron describes being very nervous before his surgery the following week, and how stopping hormone therapy has affected him emotionally.

Overall, each Youtube personalities' experiences are important and can be helpful and comforting for individuals seeking sex confirmation surgery. The video uploads allow for an insightful look into individual experiences, and can give other trans children an idea as to how the recovery process progresses. In addition, allowing viewers to understand the excitement and nerves each personality felt before surgery, invites individuals to be part of a shared lived experience. Although this information is vital for those pursuing medical interventions to know how others personally felt about the surgery, it also alientates those who do not by reiterating a normative narrative where all trans youth want surgery.

Blockers

As mentioned previously, hormone blockers are particularly helpful in pausing changes the body naturally begins during puberty. Many of the Youtube personalities in this analysis have been on blockers since their early teen years. As a result, many of these individuals did not go through puberty, and the corresponding bodily changes associated with the process. However, there is a lack of information is regards to hormone blockers in comparison to the information available on cross sex hormone therapy or sex confirmation surgery. None of the Youtube personalities reviewed include a specific video explaining their experiences on blockers, although the majority included their experiences with cross sex hormone therapy. *Jazz Jennings, Ashton Daniel, MilesChronicles, ChandlerNWilson, Justin Blake, Sam Collins, Nick Camryn,*

Storm Ryan, and *Max Aaron* provide minimal exposure and information on hormone blockers, although they mention briefly they take blockers.

For instance, Jazz Jennings only mentions that she is taking blockers twice throughout the 45 videos uploaded on her page. In Jennings' video "Preparing for Gender Confirmation Surgery" (2018), she explains that due to the hormone blockers she had been taking, her body never went through puberty. In addition, in "Jazz a Transgender Child : Q&A" (2014), a viewer asked if she took blockers and she explained that she did. However, Jennings did not provide any advice on how to access hormone blockers or the possible side effects associated with the medication.

The lack of information available on puberty blockers is important to note because blockers are typically the first step available for trans children looking to pause any permanent changes caused from puberty. Interestingly, the majority of personalities were more eager to provide their experiences with cross hormone therapy, which entails injecting medication into their muscles, than they were to provide information on puberty blockers, which is typically an orally administered medication.

The absence of information on puberty blockers is interesting because it once again reiterates the construction of a normative narrative that places an emphasis on the value of permanent medical interventions that alter the physical body. Since puberty blockers place a pause on physical changes associated with puberty, they are constructed as less significant than transformative interventions such as gender confirmation surgery or hormonal injections, where physical changes can be seen. By excluding information and experiences with hormone blockers,

there is a significant emphasis being placed on the importance of seeing physical changes that are in congruence with the societal expectations associated with gender.

Emphasizing the Importance of "Passing":

In addition to information on medical practices commonly associated with the transgender community, content creators also offer information on how to approach social and societal barriers. These barriers include being a transgender student, how to choose a name, the use of public restrooms, how to publicly come out, and how to "pass" in public. Passing is defined as a "transgender person's ability to go through daily life without others making the assumption that they are transgender" (Glaad, 2018). The majority of Youtube content creators offer advice and information on how to address these social obstacles, placing emphasis on the importance of passing socially and appearing as their gender identity.

For instance, Ashton Daniel offers advice for transgender individuals on socially passing in "Life hacks for trans guys" (2017). In this video segment, he advices trans men in fashion and the act of passing through the process of "packing". As discussed previously, many transgender Youtubers offer advice on how to pass as their identified gender. In doing so, they encourage existing gender norms and stereotypes to adhere to in order to appear as their respective gender identity. This adds to the notion of a normative narrative because Youtubers are constructing their viewers as individuals who want to adhere to these gender roles and value passing in public. Specifically, Ashton expresses shopping for men's pants can be extremely difficult for trans individuals with smaller hips. He offers shopping tips and "life hacks" in order to make pants fit trans individuals better. Alike Ashton Daniel, Ryan Jacob Flores' uploaded a video entitled

"FTM Trans guy // Men's Clothing Haul" (2016) where he shared his tips on finding gender specific clothing that fit him well.

In addition to clothing choices, Ashton and Flores incorporate tips on how to appear to have male genitals. Ashton advises his viewers on how to create a "P Packer" with socks and other materials in order to pass in public by creating the illusion of having a penis. He refers to packing as a masculine act, and states it is as crucial as chest binding is in the art of passing in public, which is a concern for a majority of transgender individuals. Another example of advice on passing in public is "FTM Transgender: How to Pass" (2015) by Ryan Jacobs Flores. Ryan documents the steps he takes to pass in public, specifically when out shopping, sitting in public, binding his chest, and packing. It is evident that advice videos sessions such as those previously mentioned are specifically cultivated towards a transgender audience, and sharing this information with the community will be helpful in approaching social obstacles transgender individuals face daily.

Overall, by offering advice on how to pass in video session such as in "Life hacks for trans guys" by Ashton Daniel, "FTM Trans guy // Men's Clothing Haul" and "FTM Transgender: How to Pass" by Ryan Jacobs Flores, "do I have bottom surgery" by Sam Collins, and "Binding for FtM" by Justin Blake, Youtube personalities are encouraging "passing" and frame the act of following or "mimicking" gender roles and identities as desirable. For individuals who do not want to adhere to societal views of gender, individuals may feel pressured to act accordingly based on the limited information given to them by transgender Youtube personalities. This is particularly amplified when transgender viewers are looking to

Youtube personalities to tell them what is acceptable, which may affect an individual's personal transition or how they view their body.

The Role of Social Support and Socioeconomic Status:

As a result of the cultivation of a narrative that values medical interventions during transitioning, trans youths are expected to seek procedures that will transform their bodies to reflect the cultural expectations associated with their gender identity. However, in order to pursue the aforementioned medical interventions, not only does an individual have to be desirous of physical change, but their socioeconomic status and social support play a key role in accessing safe and efficient medical care.

Socioeconomic Status

Although Youtube personalities do not typically discuss their personal socioeconomic status with their viewers, it is clear each individual can be considered to belong in the upper tiers of economic and social classes. This notion is clearly illustrated through their video content. In each video, individuals can view their favorite personality situated typically in their clean and nicely decorated bedrooms through high definition camera lenses. Another defining characteristic of their socioeconomic status is that there is an absence of information on the costs of the various procedures and experiences the Youtube personalities were privileged to have.

For instance, as discussed previously, the majority of transgender personalities in this study have undergone some type of sex confirmation surgery. However, in order to receive sex confirmation surgery, an individual must have access to money or medical insurance to cover the necessary fees. Sex reassignment surgery and accompanying transition procedures can range

towards an upwards of $100,000 without distinct medical plans that offer coverage on the particular procedure being assessed (Whitlock, 2018).

Many Youtube personalities have the privilege to access multiple sex reassignment surgeries, and share their experiences publically through their pages. Interestingly, only a small minority of individuals discuss financially how to access the surgery. For instance, Ryan Jacobs Flores states "so the cost for my surgery for me was a copay so I didn't have to pay for the whole surgery. According to the plan that I have, so like for the Kaiser medical plan I have specifically, $150 was it for me" (Ryan Jacobs Flores, 2017). However, this information was only prompted after a viewer submitted the question personally.

Additionally, cross sex hormone therapy or HRT can cause around $30-$180 a month, not including the multiple therapist visits, which can cost more than $100 per appointment (Ellis, 2013), or the additional costs of syringes, various appropriate doctors' appointments, or lab work necessary in obtaining the medication. In Ashton Daniel's video "Starting HRT under 18", Ashton briefly mentions illegal ways to get testerone, by stating "there are illegal ways to get HRT. I have not done any of them, and I wouldn't recommend them, but they are out there" (2017). Typically, the illegal ways to obtain hormones are less expensive, which may be something individuals have to resort to if they do not have enough funding. Ashton Daniel recommends not to take illegal hormones, but does not offer additional methods that could aid an individual that can not afford to conventional buy HRT. Nonetheless, there are non-governmental organizations, such as Planned Parenthood and a variety of transgender health clinics, that offer HRT at a lower, more affordable cost. Interestingly, none of these methods were mentioned during any of the influential video blogs. As a result, individuals who do not

have the economic means to support HRT are left without this vital information. However, they are still subject to the notion that all trans youths should seek medical interventions while transitioning.

In addition, transportation to the numerous medical appointments necessary in obtaining HRT serves as a barrier to care as well. As children, the majority of trans individuals viewing the video content do not have a driver's license yet, much less an available car to transport themselves to their appointments. More often than not, legal guardians will need to be present for the appointments, meaning parents will most likely have to take off work to accompany their child. While some individuals are able to take off numerous days of work, this is typically only possible when a parent or guardian is financially secure or in a flexible career path. Overall, Youtube personalities seem to incorrectly assume that their entire audience has enough money and access to services that aid in seeking these costly medical interventions.

Social Support

The role of social support is vital in any individual's life. However, as a child that is going through a social, and at times medical, transition, social support is extremely beneficial in an individual's mental health, and access to medical practices. Specifically, transgender children are particularly susceptible to a myriad of negative side effects associated with the loss of social support from family and friends.

To begin, as discussed previously, mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety are very common among the transgender community. A study found that helping trans individuals cope with social stigma "particularly by drawing on social support, may promote better mental health, which could help reduce suicidality in this population" (Trujillo, 2018). Although the

Youtube vloggers have expressed how "lucky" they are to have supportive parents, very little give advice on what to do if an individual does not have a strong support system. For example, in "Jazz: A Transgender Child (Letter to the World)", Jennings states that "my family has taught me to be proud of myself, but they don't understand how proud I am of them because they have been the best family I could have asked for. Without them, I probably would not be the person I am today" (2014). In a separate video, Jennings was asked "What advice you would give to parents struggling with trans kids?" (Jazz Jennings, 2014). Jennings responds that parents will have to learn to love their child for who they are. In addition, she questions the parents that are having difficulty accepting their trans child by asking "would they rather have a dead daughter or a living son?" (2014). This comment is in direct reference to the ongoing trend of depression and mental illness found among transgender people. Although Jennings does approach the topic of not having social support, she does so only after a viewer prompts the question, and offers a response that is not necessarily helpful. By saying a parent will have to learn to love their child, Jennings does not offer any methods in fostering an open dialogue between parents and their child, or how to improve the relationship. In doing so, Jennings creates a parallel by saying parents should love their child no matter what, however many trans children fear they will lose their family's support. As a consequence, children see Jennings' parents as the ideal standard, however more often than not parents are not as accepting as the Jennings family.

Another instance of creating an ideal parent reaction to their child's transition is when *ChandlerNWilson* uploaded the video submission entitled "Coming Out as Transgender Agender" in 2015 where Chandler films himself coming out to his mother. Once Chandler tells their mother that they identify as transgender agender, their mother hugs them and states "Well, I

love you very much. I just want you to be you. I don't want you to be scared of who you are. I want you to be happy with who you are" (ChandlerNWilson, 2015). Although this reaction is deemed standard among the transgender Youtube personalities analyzed in this section, many transgender individuals can only hope their parents will accept them in this manner. By deeming this reaction as standard, it sets high expectation for transgender children who have yet to come out to their parents or guardians. Additionally, while coming out, Chandler states that "I have a lot of friends at school who support me" (ChandlerNWilson, 2015). Once again, setting a precedence that another individual's school friends will be just as supportive in comparison. For instance, if a trans child has limited social support, seeing that other trans youths have supportive friends and family can be detrimental to their mental and physical health.

Another important aspect of parental support is that a trans child will be unable to gain medical intervention, if they desired, without parental consent. As mentioned previously, it would be impossible for a transgender child to obtain blockers, HRT, and sex confirmation surgeries without the support of a parent. Ashton Daniel specifies in "HRT under 18" how crucial parental consent is when attempting to start hormone injections. Ashton states "it took a long time to convince my parents it was the right step because they were scared of the consequences that won't change back" (Ashton Daniel, 2017). However, Ashton's parent did provide an expensive therapist that specializes in gender, who eventually helped gain parental consent for Ashton to start testosterone injections. Ashton explains, "If you have a good gender therapist, they will help you convince your parents. My therapist did present many factors that made my parents step over to my side, you know, the 40% suicide rate for trans teens and how beginning to transition and feel at home with themselves can you know drop that rate and make

kids feel more comfortable" (Ashton Daniel, 2017). In addition to Ashton, the majority of trans Youtubers decided to utilize medical methods to aid their physical transition, meaning the majority of parents had to give consent. Although Ashton offers a way to convince parents, it is only through the use of an expensive therapist his parents provided through stable financial means. Once again, the community is leaving out a large portion of trans individuals who cannot relate to the standard identity Youtube personalities are constructing.

Conclusion

Overall, by analyzing the viral discourse surrounding trans youth in the United States, I was able to identify a recurring transformative narrative that emphasizes the need of medical interventions during transition. By emphasizing the significance of medical intervention in the United States, Youtube trans vloggers are reinforcing traditional gender roles, cultural stereotypes, and a relationship between the physical body and one's gender identity. As a consequence, trans individuals viewing the analyzed content are exposed to a constructed narrative in which they are expected to be desirous of medical interventions and permanent bodily change. In addition, not only are their trans viewers expected to desire medical interventions, they are also expected to have the resources necessary to seek the costly surgeries and medications associated with full medical transition.

This narrative illustrates the importance of the need for research pertaining to the health of the vulnerable demographic of trans youth. As stated previously, trans youth are vulnerable to numerous health deprecating variables, and yet, there is minimal formal research devoted to this demographic. This project highlights the gaps in knowledge and understanding of the demographic's health. As a result, this analysis introduces room for a variety of ethnographic

work targeting trans children, gender identity, and trans youth in media. For instance, ethnographic work can look into why trans youth seem to be favoring medical interventions, or how to improve trans youth presence in media that can be less restrictive and more inclusive than the current viral climate appears to be.

One limit identified in this project is the lack of male to female or agender transgender content creators represented in the Youtube users selected. Overall, the majority of trans Youtubers were found to identify as female to male transgender individuals. Among the users selected for this analysis, only one individual identified as male to female transgender, and one transgender individual identified as agender transgender. The lack of male to female or agender identity status on Youtube is important to note, and can lead to further research on improving media representation for the trans youth demographic. Additionally, it would also have been interesting to see how more male to female or agender transgender individuals represented in the users selected would have changed the current narrative being constructed. Since narratives are always being constructed and constantly changing, it would be interesting to see how these variable changes alter the final product.

Another interesting aspect highlighted in this analysis is how Youtube content creators are offering medical advice strictly cultivated through their own experiences. The idea of expertise based off lived experiences would be a fundamental concept to research further in this context. The content emphasizes the gap between lived experience and actual medical knowledge. For instance, the majority of trans youtubers are speaking about medical issues from a lived experience, not from a formal medical education. It would be interesting to see if viewers

are treating the content creators' medical advice as the same as a professional's diagnosis, and what the unintended side effects of this would be.

This work is important to continue because Youtube reaches a wide range of individuals, and can have a similar effect outside of the United States. By emphasizing medical interventions and promoting bodily change to reflect gender identity, it further reinforces existing gender stereotypes and a dichotomous view of sex and gender. These gender norms are one of the main contributors to stigma and discrimination of trans individuals in Westernized cultures. By identifying this narrative, we can work to construct a more accepting and inclusive narrative, without taking away from the genuine and supportive viral community the trans youth are creating.

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