

Resiliency of Transgender Youth and Young Adults



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Resiliency of Transgender Youth

Traditional Western culture instills gender categories and stereotypes within individuals beginning at birth (Poulin-Dubois, Serbin, Eichstedt, Sen, & Beissel, 2002). As early as 24 months of age, children understand gender categories and experience social pressures to adhere to the category accompanying their anatomical sex (Hill & Flom, 2007; Carver, Yunger, & Perry, 2003; Poulin-Dubois et al., 2002). The terms *trans* or *transgender* has been used to describe an individual whose gender identity and expression (i.e. woman or man) is not in alignment with their anatomical sex assigned at birth (i.e. male or female) (American Counseling Association, 2010). Gender identity denotes 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” (Israel, 2005, p. 55). Individuals who do not assume the defined roles and characteristics of the gender associated with their biological sex often experience an elevated risk for negative outcomes due to their nonconformity to culturally created gender categories.

A growing body of literature suggests that individuals who identify as a sexual minority of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or gender-nonconforming are at increased risk for mental health distress (e.g. depression, anxiety, and suicidality) and victimization (Singh, Meng, & Hansen, 2014). This paper aims to discuss how transgender individuals cope with the challenges present during this transition as an adolescent or young adult. In addition, it will examine three main coping strategies used while undergoing a gender transition: finding sources of support, identifying a true sense of self, and the desire to help others.

Given the vast amount of psychological distress and traumatic life events reported by individuals that identify as transgender, this population is under relative interest in how they overcome adversity and continue on to lead successful lives. Additional research suggests that

transitioning one's biological sex to mirror one's gender identity and expression is beneficial to creating a development of an integrated gender identity and alleviating negative psychological outcomes (e.g. depression, anxiety, and suicidality) (Singh, Hays, & Watson, 2011; Grossman, D'augelli, & Frank, 2011). These are important implications to consider in order to create increasingly gender inclusive and supportive communities.

Resiliency

There is great variability in the definitions of resilience, which has led to the necessity of specificity in referring to the domain of the resiliency at focus. In the case of transgender youth in this paper, the sources of resilience can be found within two domains of personal strengths and environmental protective factors (Benard, 2004). The domains of personal strengths include social competence, problem solving, autonomy, and sense of purpose (Benard, 2004). Environmental protective factors are found in the schools, community, or family and include caring relationships, clear and positive expectations for achievement by educators, community members, and family members, and opportunities to participate and give back in the areas of school, community life, or family (Benard 2004; Hass & Graydon, 2008). However, this clear distinction between factors of resiliency does not detect the dynamic interaction of the individual and the environment. Resiliency is an innate characteristic in all humans that is both a function of innate cognitive abilities as well as dependent on exposure to environmental factors that provide support to be successful (Hass & Graydon, 2008).

More specifically for the LGBTQQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning) youth community, resiliency is largely part of negotiating their "place" in the larger part of the LGBTQQ youth community. This is often sought out using environmental factors such as social media to validate and empower themselves by establishing relationships with

others who also identify as a sexual minority (Singh, 2012). Further research by Singh et al. (2011) has shown that transgender adults maintain awareness of transgender prejudice in their community and around the world as a basis for resilience. Engaging in this type of activism establishes resiliency by instilling a sense of hope in regards to living a good life as a transgender person through networking with a supportive community in which they can serve as a positive role model (Singh et al., 2011). Resiliency can be defined as a set of learned behaviors that precede one's ability to cope despite hardships. This paper aims to provide a deeper understanding of transgender individuals' resiliency strategies in order to seek to understand their experiences of overcoming adversity.

Challenges for Transgender Youth Resiliency

With the intention of understanding how transgender youth are able to cope with adversity, it is important to acknowledge the challenges that many within this population face. Perhaps one of the most critical barriers for transgender youth is negative reactions, or lack of support from family. In a study by Grossman, D'Augelli, Howell, and Hubbard, more than 59% of the transgender participants reported facing negative reactions from their parents after initially becoming open about their gender identity (2005). Additionally, 40% of the parents or other family members in this sample chose not to speak nor spend time with the participants (Grossman et al., 2005). Damaging these relationships at a young age can be detrimental because transgender youth are often too young to qualify for programs to receive care and are unable to access medical care to transition without the permission and support of their parents.

Negative reactions towards gender nonconformity in Western culture may largely be due to the perpetrator's perceptions of an individual that identifies as gender-nonconformed (Ma'ayan, 2003). By adolescence there is a heightened sense of the imaginary audience in which

the individual believes that others are constantly watching and judging them (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2013). This plays a large role in the intense socialization of stereotypical gender roles of males and females (Ma'ayan, 2003). In a study on 245 LGBT young adults (ages 21-25), it was found that both adolescent and young adult gender nonconformity was associated with higher levels of young adult depression and lower levels of young adult life satisfaction (Toomey, Diaz, & Russell, 2010). The findings of higher levels of depression and lower levels of life satisfaction were also associated with LGBT school victimization. That is, those participants that experienced victimization in their school setting while identifying as LGBT experienced higher levels of depression and lower levels of life satisfaction (Toomey et al., 2010). Further research using the same data set has shown that LGBT young adults who reported high victimization during adolescence were 2.6 times more likely to report depression above the clinical cutoff (CES-D score ≥ 16). Additionally, these individuals were 5.6 times more likely to report having attempted suicide at least once when compared to individuals who did not experience victimization (Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010).

This is evidence to suggest that educational institutions can be unsafe and stressful places of victimization and bullying for transgender youth (Toomey et al., 2010; Russell et al., 2010). Though student-led gay-straight alliance (GSA) clubs can be helpful in supporting sexual minority students, there is still a strong risk of dropout or discontinuation of further education for students who identify as transgender (Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010). Research has shown that sexual minority students who attend a school without a GSA are more likely to drop out than those with a GSA at their school (Walls et al., 2010). Furthermore, a study by Kosciw (2004) found that sexual minority youth that experienced victimization in school were twice as likely to not attend college when compared to their heterosexual peers. Often, the psychological energy

required to address issues of a stigmatized sexual identity diverts attention from career development (Walls, et al., 2010).

Transgender transitions involve an extensive amount of change such as name and pronoun usages, use of voice/gestures, change in clothing choice, change in facial and cranial hair, and surgery to alter sex characteristics. These transitions complement a change in identity expression, which in turn creates changes in the transgender person's relationships with others (Norwood, 2012). This can manifest to the extent in which families experience feelings of loss or grief when a family member transitions (Norwood, 2012). While just a small body of research exists that concerns relational challenges for transgender individuals, narratives of transgender individuals reveal the loss of relationships they had before they began to transition, and the resulting feeling of isolation (Norwood, 2012). As with disclosures for other sexual minority orientations, family reactions to the transition of a transgender individual can serve to relieve or augment stress for the transgender person.

Avenues for Resiliency

It is essential that transgender individuals find sources of support in order to help cope with their change. A common misconception about individuals who identify as transgender is that they are experiencing confusion; those that hold this belief often experience difficulty when accepting an individual's transitional change (Norwood, 2012). In interviews of transgender individuals aging between 19 and 52, many participants described being able to define their gender as an important aspect of their resilience to cope with discrimination (Singh et al., 2011). Using appropriate pronouns regarding their gender was a way to share a personal decision as well as resist traditional binary definitions of gender. The use of this chosen pronoun is often a way for transgender individuals to be able to connect and interact with the non-transgender world

(Singh et al., 2011). Additionally, research has shown that transgender individuals are more resilient when they emphasize the importance of building relationships with a trans-affirming community (Singh, Meng, & Hansen, 2014). Emotional and social isolation were found to be a threat to resiliency, thus combating this adversity with supportive relationships were vital aspects to a healthy and successful gender transition (Singh et al., 2014).

Instilling hope for the future by identifying a true sense of self is a common avenue for resiliency within the transgender community. A qualitative study of 55 transgender youth found that a high sense of personal mastery in their identity was a key resiliency factor within this population (Grossman et al., 2011). It was concluded that increasing this type of task-oriented coping could be effective in helping this population move forward in their transition and avoid adverse mental health outcomes (Grossman et al., 2011). Additional studies have shown that spiritual beliefs helped to cultivate a sense of hope despite traumatic life events in transgender people of color (Singh & McKleroy, 2011). The same study discussed that participants experienced a critical incident in their lives that aided in developing a sense of pride, which ultimately helped to overcome barriers in their transition such as transphobia from others (Singh & McKleroy, 2011). Once participants were able to recognize gender oppression in various avenues of their life, they were able to speak up for themselves and become assertive and confident when navigating potential discrimination within both school and work environments (Singh & McKleroy, 2011).

An additional strategy for resilience in the population of transgender youth is a desire to advocate for and be a part of the LGBTQQQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning) community. Having a role in this community addresses issues of powerlessness as a sexual minority as well as is an avenue for empowering one's self (Singh, 2012). Especially for

transgender youth of color, these connections with others that identify as transgender is a way for them to validate their recently changed gender and sexual identity (Singh, 2012). Further research suggests that connections within the LGBTQQ community enhances resiliency within transgender individuals by providing a place of support when experiencing verbal, physical, and/or sexual harassment (Singh & McKleroy, 2011). These avenues of support could be law enforcement, legal resources, or health care resources that were ‘transgenderpositive.’

Methods

Research was collected utilizing the ERIC-EBSO database through the Chapman University Library website. The keywords used in the search were “transgender,” “resiliency,” and “transgender youth.” Additional research articles were retrieved using references from previously found articles.

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants who fit the criteria of identifying as transgender and considering themselves transitioned. Interviews were completed in person or over Skype due to location constraints. Interviews questions were aimed to capture resiliency strategies as well as life events that have contributed to the individual’s transition [see Appendix A]. The three interviews lasted from 90 minutes to 180 minutes, and recording devices were used to transcribe the interviews with approval from the interviewee. Additional notes were taken using pen and paper during the interview.

Participants

Participants in this study included three males post transition. The participants were located through mutual contacts and informed about confidentiality before beginning the interview. The participants’ names have been changed for confidentiality purposes.

The first participant, Terrance, is a 23-year-old male who transitioned from female to male beginning at the age of 18. Terrance has chosen to be referred to using the “he” pronoun. He was born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri and raised by his mother along with three sisters. Although Terrance has been using male pronouns since he was 18, he first identified as a lesbian at age 14 and did not realize he was transgender until age 17. Terrance has been a victim of harassment at his job at McDonald’s throughout high school in which his co-workers refused to acknowledge his transition or change in pronoun use. Terrance has been on his own since he graduated high school, and currently lives in an apartment in Missouri. He works full time for an insurance company and enjoys music, dance, and basketball. Terrance is most looking forward to becoming financially secure to be able to afford the medical surgeries he wants to fully align his transition.

The second participant is Shannon, who is currently 21 years old and began their transition from female to male at age 16. Shannon prefers the gender pronoun “they.” Shannon born, raised, and currently resides in San Diego, California and has experienced depression and body-shaming throughout their gender transition. Though their relationship with their mother and brother is “difficult,” Shannon finds support through two of their close friends as well as a past high school teacher they became close with during their transition. They currently work at Starbucks and hope to get better at “managing real-person things, like home management and personal hygiene.” Shannon is looking forward to studying abroad or interning in another country as well as no longer having breasts or a uterus.

The third participant, Allen, transitioned from female to male at age 20 and prefers to use the pronoun “he.” Allen is currently 39 years old and lives in San Francisco, California with his partner of 17 years, who also identifies as transgender, and their adopted son. Allen is a stay-at-

home parent who enjoys going to the gym, drawing, painting, and listening to music. Though Allen grew up in a conservative, Christian town where he experienced discrimination against the LGBTQQ community, he was largely supported by his mother, father, and friends. His parents divorced when he was born, and his father identifies as homosexual and transgender. Allen's life motto is "It gets better," and enjoys speaking with classrooms about his experiences as a transgender person.

Findings

Theme 1: Responding to changed relationships

A common struggle for transitioned individuals is navigating familial responses and a lack of understanding regarding the transition. Nevertheless, it is important to note that many people who surround the transitioned individual experience their own emotional issues.

Narratives in research on transgender individuals also reveal a struggle between 'the self and other' (Norwood, 2012). This is indicative that transitioned individuals often want to help family members understand and come to terms with their identities, but often feel they need to focus on themselves (Norwood, 2012). Transitioned individuals often struggle with determining whose feelings and needs should be privileged, and the dilemma of supporting their own needs and feelings.

Terrance dealt extensively with his mother's initial negative perceptions regarding his transition by following her rules until he legally did not have to anymore. By his mother's request, he came home at 5:00pm curfews on Friday and Saturday nights, and attended counseling for most of his middle and high school years. Terrance expressed that his mother suffered from mental health issues that negatively affected their relationship. Terrance's mother struggled with the idea of Terrance being "different than everyone else" and was constantly

feeling judged by others for Terrance's transition. Terrance's mother called the police on Terrance twice during high school, for no apparent reason except that she did not know what else to do to prevent him from transitioning. Terrance would be taken to the police station and assessed by their mental health team, then returned to his mother after assessments showed no signs of mental illness or abnormalities. Terrance empathized with his mother's own struggles to understand his transition, and "did not fight back because [he] did not want to make it harder on her." When Terrance turned 18, he moved out and only began to reconnect with his mom once he was more fully transitioned.

Shannon's family was not accepting of their transition, which is not uncommon for transgender youth (Grossman, 2005). Shannon describes their mom as a "transphobic and fatphobic" who used Shannon's weight as an excuse to not allow them to begin taking hormone supplements to further their transition. It is evident through Shannon's experiences that family members may struggle with making meaning of a member's transition as well as begin to relate to them differently, as supported in research by Norwood (2012). Shannon's mom sent them to an eating disorder clinic to lose weight during high school, but immediately removed them when the clinic was validating of Shannon's gender transition. Additionally, Shannon's older brother refused to acknowledge the transition at all and claims that "gender and sex are the same thing." Shannon tried to discuss with their brother what their transition symbolizes for them, but their brother was not supportive and claimed they were just going through "a phase that would go away." Shannon's brother currently lives out of state and Shannon does not see him much.

Allen's extended family was conservative and Christian who instilled values that "being gay was frowned upon" and suggested that "people should not tell anyone about their gay thoughts, as it is sinful to think that way." Allen always knew he identified as transgender, but

did not display his identity publically at first because of his family's beliefs. Once Allen moved to San Francisco and into an inclusive community, he felt more comfortable with his transition process and stopped worrying about what others thought. Research by Singh et al. supports that a transgender individual's freedom to define their gender is a key aspect of their ability to cope with discrimination (2011). Allen began to openly identify as transgender and created strong relationships through a gay youth group in his town. Throughout his transition, Allen lost many friends from church. He appeared to use San Francisco as an environmental protective factor of resiliency, as the losses of his church friends were quickly replaced by relationships within the LGBTQQ community that served as further protection during his transition (Benard, 2004). Although Allen's previous relationships may have suffered following his transition, he has come to terms with those losses because "they did not understand [the transition] and did not want to understand." Allen is happy to have people in his life who support him and his transition, and has moved on from previous relationships that have not been as accepting.

Theme 2: Reaching a turning-point of established self-identity

Though transitioning is often a gradual and rather slow process, there is often a pivotal moment in one's life that one can use as a source of clarity or inspiration for the process. Frequently, this time is when a sense of self-identity as a transgender individual feels comprehensive and comfortable.

For Terrance, this moment came when he was baptized as a Christian at age 18. Terrance reported that he had always considered himself religious, but it was at that point that he "went from saying to living." Although he was open as a transgender at the time and the only person who showed up to support his baptism was his sister, Terrance found that moment as a point that stood for him beginning to live his life the way he had always wanted to. Past research supports

that a sense of autonomy, a sense of purpose, and a feeling of competency allowed him to recognize his personal strengths in order to successfully move forward into his new life with his new identity (Benard, 2004). During most of his adolescence, Terrance dealt with severe depression and was at risk for dropping out of school. On top of his emotional issues, Terrance's relationship with his mother was at its worst. He describes this time as feeling "out of control and as if nothing was going right [in his life]." Terrance was drinking every day beginning in the morning, as well as using marijuana heavily. For Terrance, turning his life to God through baptism meant a fresh start for himself as male as well as new beginnings of consistency and positivity. He began to take his transitional journey one day at a day, and was able to cope with victimization at work and his suffering relationships in a healthier manner by recognizing that God had a plan for him and "was always going to have [his] back." Past research supports that fostering hope for the future is an effective resiliency factor for transgender youth to avoid adverse mental health outcomes (Grossman et al., 2011).

Shannon saw a turn of hope when they attended an engineering camp at a nearby university during high school. At this camp, Shannon voluntarily took part of a body positive workshop held on campus. This workshop made Shannon realize how much time and energy they had spent hating themselves, as well as the importance of loving themselves and their body especially during the time of their transition. Similar to conclusions by Benard (2004), Shannon's ability to see their body as worthy and competent was a key aspect to their resiliency. This time allowed Shannon to question gender as a social construct, as well as realize the current societal stereotypes of what it meant to be a girl. At this time in their transition, Shannon was questioning their decision and the negative implications it had created for them, such as an unaccepting reaction from her family. Yet after the workshop, Shannon came to terms with what it meant to

be a girl and realized they did not want to identify with it at all anymore. Research is suggestive that when a transgender individual is able to recognize gender oppression in their life, they are better able to speak up for themselves and become more confident and assertive when confronted with discrimination (Singh & McKleroy, 2011). The workshop had provided them with a framework to understand the constructs of gender and allow them to comfortably move forward into the male gender identification. It was at this turning-point that Shannon decided to abolish gender stereotypes by identifying using the pronoun “they.”

For Allen, a major turning point in his life was when he moved to San Francisco and was able to transition in an atmosphere that was highly supportive of the LGBTQ community. He was able to meet others who identified as transgender and hear their similar stories. On his first day in San Francisco, he listened to a transgender spokesperson and heard her talk about her experiences as a transgender individual. At that talk, “everything made sense, and it clicked [for Allen].” Allen described that moment as “a slow and gradual process, but I began my transition from that moment.” Additionally, he met his current partner in San Francisco and was able to start his life the way he had always wanted to. Allen and his partner were also able to give back to the LGBTQ community and spread awareness for all its members. Allen feels privileged to be in an inclusive area where he can advocate for such rights, as he understands there are other parts of the country or world where people cannot do such things. Benard (2004) agrees that both problem solving skills and having a sense of purpose for advocacy are key aspects to resiliency. Allen’s decision to remove himself from an unsupportive environment into a welcoming one is a critical aspect of his ability to cope during his transition.

Theme 3: Advocating for rights

There is research to suggest that those who lend support to others are able to cope with adversity better than those who do not because these individuals tend to feel better about themselves and their self-worth (Benard, 2004). The participants in this study support these findings by expressing how involvement with the LGBTQQ community gave them a platform of support despite the hardships they were experiencing.

When Terrance first began his transition, he started a video blog on YouTube so that he could share his story with others. This blog served not only as a diary for him, but as a way to support and connect with others that identify as transgender. Research supports that social media is an avenue of resiliency for transgender individuals because it allows these individuals to establish relationships with those who share a similar story or identity (Singh, 2012). Terrance reported that some of his followers have become his good friends, and that they got to meet in person after initially talking online. In Missouri, Terrance had a difficult time connecting with the LGBTQQ community, but this online platform gave him an opportunity to educate others on a personal level about what it means to go through a gender transition, as well as abolish negative stereotypes concerning the transgender community. Terrance reported that one of his main purposes for creating these videos were to “make the idea of being transgender seem less weird.” Terrance received great support on his channel, and this sense of empowerment can attribute to Terrance’s ability to cope with victimization in his geographic area (Singh, 2011). There is further evidence to suggest that making these connections within the LGBTQQ community provides a place of support when experience harassment (Singh & McKleroy, 2011). Despite dealing with depression, anxiety, and discrimination at work, Terrance found confidence by publishing these videos and his YouTube channel was even featured in a local magazine.

Since transitioning, Shannon has discovered a deep interest for social justice. Shannon identifies one of their strengths as communicating with people, and enjoys discussing issues regarding social injustices and policies. Shannon sees change for communities of adversity as essential, and finds they can learn more about “real-life issues” from just speaking with other people rather than in a traditional classroom. Throughout high school, Shannon advocated for transgender rights such as obtaining gender-neutral campus bathrooms and even being nominated for the peer-voted homecoming court. Having opportunities to advocate in avenues of powerlessness is a key aspect to the resiliency of transgender individuals in establishing self-confidence to support their own rights against injustice in their lives (Singh, 2012). Since transitioning from a female to a male, Shannon has adjusted their original mindsets and they report that “people like [themselves] need to advocate for their lives.” Now, they “willing and ready” to support other people who need that representation. This finding is consistent with previous research that has shown that connecting to a trans-affirming community, through advocating for rights at school, can support the navigation of other relationships such as those with family and friends (Singh et al., 2014).

Allen is an advocate for embracing change and enjoys telling people his story. He often speaks at talks and conferences, as well as in educational classrooms. These opportunities for him to tell his story as a transgender person to a wide audience are a “great thing for society to become aware of”. Allen believes change does not just appear out of nowhere, but that when it is brought to light it can create shifts in mindsets and decisions. Previous research is suggestive that reframing mental health challenges in the transgender community can help transgender individuals cope with the discrimination they receive (Singh et al., 2014). Allen uses his talks as an opportunity to create this change, even if only in a small increment.

Final Thoughts

Each participant in this study offered unique narratives of their personal challenges and successes. Yet in commonality, each offered parting advice for both transgender individuals and others going through a personal hardship. Terrance found strength through connecting with a population going through similar struggles and shared his reasoning behind creating a video blog during his transition. He said:

I wanted to educate people. I wanted people to be able to see what happens, because there are so many stereotypes and myths. I wanted people to be able to see the experiences first-hand by someone they know, and not just think ‘Oh, they are a freak.’

Through their own experience of depression and isolation, Shannon has found sympathy for others going through mental health challenges and shared a deep compassion for these individuals. They said:

Just remember that your experiences are completely valid and your struggles are valid and to not let others tell you how you should be feeling about things in your life. Try to take care of yourself mentally and physically and let someone know if you do not think you can.

Allen shared advice by reflecting on his own experiences and comparing his feelings from when he was transitioning to his current state, many years after his transition. He said:

Now that I look back on it, the phrase, ‘keep going’ comes to mind...I feel like everyone goes through challenges in their lifetime and everyone deals with it differently, but for me, I always saw challenges as an opportunity to better myself... It gets better. Embrace change. Things are changing all the time...even if it is only in small increments, change is still happening.

Discussion

Though each participant in this study each offered a unique story, it is important to notice commonalities between individuals who undergo a gender transition. A growing body of literature suggests that transgender individuals are often at increased risk for mental health distress and victimization. Alongside these adverse outcomes, individuals who undergo a gender transition often experience a dramatic shift in their relationships with family and friends. This paper aimed to observe how transgender individuals cope with the challenges present during this milestone as well as examine three main coping strategies used while undergoing a gender transition: finding sources of support, identifying a true sense of self, and the desire to help others.

Limitations

Although the current study aimed to explore the resiliency of transgender individuals throughout and after their transition, there are restrictions on the generalizability of such findings. First, only three individuals were interviewed and they all transitioned from female to male. It is possible that the specific gender of transition could have varying effects on the experiences and coping strategies of the individual. Furthermore this study did not capture a wide range of ethnicities, which should be considered when generalizing findings as culture can play a large role in gender stereotypes, sexuality, and acceptance. Despite common themes found among the participants, additional theme may be uncovered with a larger sample of more diverse individuals who identify as transgender.

Implications for Practice

The current study presents implications for practitioners in the mental health field, such as school psychologists. First, it provides common challenges experienced by youth who undergo

a gender transition, such as changing relationships with loved ones. These changes can be critical at young ages, and should be considered by professionals when working with this population. Additionally, this paper provides a strong basis of commonality for transgender individuals' mechanisms for coping. It was found that it is important for these individuals to identify a sense of self in their new identity, which often comes from a specific event or experience in their life, labeled as a "turning point." Lastly, it was observed that transgender individuals find strength by advocating for others within the LGBTQ community. This strategy of resiliency can be implemented by school psychologists by providing safe spaces for members and supporters of this community to speak.

Specifically in the school setting, school psychologists and school personnel should ensure that students who identify within the LGBTQ community feel safe and included in the school environment. School psychologists should identify the risks that transgender students are exposed to, such as victimization, depression, and suicidal ideation. Having connections with outside agencies and community resources would also be helpful in advocating for healthy transitions for these students as well as developing an inclusive school environment. A majority of the participants in this study discussed the importance of being active within the LGBTQ community and supporting others in issues of social injustice. It would be important for school psychologists and school personnel to ensure that this type of advocacy is done in a safe place and to help students recognize when social oppressions are impinging on students' well-beings. Since past research has shown many positive benefits for transgender individuals being advocates in social injustices, school psychologists should be aware of opportunities for these individuals to take part in such activism and share this information with them.

Further Research

There is limited longitudinal research on transgender individuals who transitioned during the K-12 school system. Further research should identify commonalities of a larger population of individuals who transitioned during their schooling experiences, as well as identify further challenges to coping with the transition during this sensitive time of development. These studies should be longitudinal and gather data at a multitude of time points in the participants' lives to capture their experiences during and after the transition. Study participants should include individuals who transitioned to/from both female and male as well as a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. It may also be helpful to include participants who are individuals in the K-12 system and do not identify as a sexual minority in order to deconstruction systems of oppression to limit harassment and victimization of transgender students in schools. Including the perspectives of those in the community that works with transgender youth would also be important in identifying sources of resiliency practiced by individuals who identify as transgender. Since it is known that empowerment opportunities are a key aspect to coping during a transition, future research should investigate how school personnel and counselors can create more opportunities for their transgender clients in this aspect of resiliency.

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Appendix A

Sample Interview Questions

1. When did you begin your gender transition (age/grade)?
2. What is your preferred gender pronoun?
3. How did your family/friends/peers respond to your transition? How did you respond?
4. Who was supportive of you during your transition?
5. How do you cope with challenges?
6. What are your areas of strength?
7. What gives your life meaning and purpose?
8. If you encountered some personal difficulties, who would you turn to for help?
9. What are your hobbies or interests? What do you do for fun?
10. What would you like to get better at?
11. What are your goals or plans for the future?
12. What was easy for you in school?
13. What was stressful or difficult for you in school?
14. Did you run into any issues with school policies during/after your transition?
15. High school is often a time for sexual exploration and “dating”. What are your experiences with dating so far? How do you think your gender identity has influenced these experiences?
16. Were there turning points in your life when you changed directions or were given a second chance? What happened? Who was there?
17. What advice do you have for others who are experiencing adversity/challenges?
18. What was it like to do this interview?