

Back In the Closet or Backed into the Corner?

How Historically Single Sex Schools Affect Gender-Expansive and Transgender Identity

Formation in Teenagers

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Abstract

This research was conducted in an attempt to indict outdated and insensitive administrative policies on behalf of transgender and gender expansive students. The researcher hypothesized that historically single sex institutions have a negative impact on transgender and gender expansive individual's identity formation. A convenience sample of 100 students from Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy, age 14-18, responded to a questionnaire pertaining to gender identity formation within Sacred Heart. Students identified their intersectional identities and reflected on their transgender and gender expansive peers' experiences. Overwhelmingly, students were unsure if transgender and gender expansive supportive policies exist within Flintridge Sacred Heart. A majority of students were suspicious of policies in support of transgender and gender expansive students. A majority of students disagreed with the sentiment that transgender and gender expansive students are adequately represented on campus policy. With this research the initial hypothesis has been confirmed that historically single sex institutions negatively impact identity formation in gender expansive and transgender students.

Introduction

In order to provide a constructive learning environment, it is the duty of an institution to provide equitable conditions to all students, including transgender and gender expansive individuals. Transgender and gender expansive students are facing a daunting wave of violence and nationwide legislative transphobia (“Issues Impacting LGBTQ Youth”). As a minority, care for transgender students is often overlooked, despite the clear need for attentive care to the physical and emotional needs of these students. Without the acknowledgement of gender diversity in historically single sex schools, administrators and faculty are putting transgender and gender expansive students at risk. It is the duty of an institution to protect and care for its students. Continuing to allow transphobic faculty, administrators and policies to flourish actively contributes to the physical and emotional damage of transgender and gender expansive youth. Institutions demean and dismiss transgender and gender expansive identities through sex and gender based policy.

Literature

At birth, newborns are assigned a biological sex, and a gender identity that is associated with that sex. Sex is a biological identifier that ranges from male, intersex, to female, and is an indicator of the kind of reproductive organs an individual possesses. Female reproductive organs are associated with the gender identity of a cisgender woman, while male reproductive organs are associated with the gender identity of a cisgender man, who utilize she/her and he/him pronouns respectively (“Glossary of Terms: Transgender - GLAAD”). The gender binary is “a system of gender classification in which all people are categorized as being either male or female,” based on cultural belief, biological sex, or societal norms (Oxford). Historically western culture has assigned tremendous importance to one’s gender identity, within the binary, as a foundational

aspect of an individual's humanity ("Glossary of Terms: Transgender - GLAAD"). Due to tradition, sex and gender identity are linked; however, gender identity is not informed by an individual's biological sex. Intersex people defy the concept of the gender binary. Those who are intersex possess any combination of male and female reproductive organs ("Glossary of Terms: Transgender - GLAAD"). Based on western tradition, many intersex individuals have experienced forced assimilation to the gender binary regardless of their gender identity.

Gender identity is a chosen identifier that is informed by an individual's emotional association with their body, their personal experiences, and their comfort within or outside of the spectrum of the gender binary. An individual's gender identity is a social emotional experience that cannot be confined by the gender binary, which is based solely on physical experience. Due to the existence of both systems of classification, some individuals experience a contradiction between their gender identity and biological sex. These individuals can identify themselves as non-binary ("In Focus: Nonbinary People - GLAAD"). The term non-binary is a category of gender identities. Non-binary describes individuals who experience their gender identity or gender expression outside of the concept of the gender binary, and differently than the gender they were assigned at birth. Some non-binary individuals use specifying labels such as demigender, agender, or bigender to further explain their experience as a non-binary individual ("In Focus: Nonbinary People - GLAAD").

There has been a substantial increase in the number of people who identify as non-binary. Of 35,000 LGBTQ+ 13-24 year olds, those who are generation Z, 26% were found to identify as non-binary. Whereas 11% of LGBTQ+ adults, older than generation Z, identify as non-binary. 42% of those non-binary adults, older than generation Z, also identify themselves as transgender ("In Focus: Nonbinary People - GLAAD"). Transgender is an adjective that some non-binary

individuals identify with, that describes a person whose gender identity differs from the biological sex they were assigned at birth (“Glossary of Terms: Transgender - GLAAD”). Not all non-binary individuals identify as transgender, and not all transgender individuals identify as non-binary. 1.8% of high school students in the United States identify as transgender (“Issues Impacting LGBTQ Youth”).

There is a clear difference between how Sacred Heart and the Catholic Magisterium approach queer youth and identity. Nationally, the Catholic church is far more conservative than locally. Globally terms such as homosexuality are used in Catholic literature to refer to all members of the LGBTQ+ community. This verbiage is derogatory, and reminiscent of the AIDS crisis and times of fear. In recent gender theory literature, better, more inclusive options are the norm.

The Catholic Magisterium has officially addressed the existence of LGBTQ+ identities. Over the past decade, material on homosexuality has been released by the Vatican and American Bishops (Maher). In such addresses, the Vatican places a “greater emphasis on finding causes and cures” for homosexual nature (Maher). To the Catholic Church, homosexual activity and homosexual orientation have different distinctions. To the Catholic Magisterium, homosexual orientation is a disorder, similar to a mental health disorder, such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia. According to the Catholic Magisterium homosexual orientation is not inherently sinful unless acted upon (Maher). To the Catholic Magisterium homosexual activity is sinful, but “judged with prudence (Maher).” Although American bishops fall under the Catholic Magisterium, they tend to place a greater emphasis on the integration and care of homosexual individuals than the Vatican. The Vatican does condemn discrimination against homosexual

individuals, and believes that the pastoral responsibility of those who are cloistered is to minister to the needs of all, including homosexuals(Maher).

In 1997 the Catholic Church created a pastoral message entitled, *Always Our Children*, for the parents of Homosexual children and Pastoral ministers of homosexual individuals. *Always Our Children* is intended to emphasize the acknowledgement and acceptance of homosexual children (Maher). Despite its intention, *Always Our Children* has a caveat, love and accept your children and congregation, but not their “lifestyle”. Consistent with the narrative of the Catholic Magisterium, *Always Our Children* acknowledges and endorses the Catholic belief that homosexual activity is sinful. “I love you but not your lifestyle” is a sentiment which puts undue pressure on queer individuals to conform and suppress the “queer” aspects of their personality in order to be “worthy” of love. Studies show queer youth experience an unhealthy amount of disconnect from their family, due to fear of rejection (Maher).

LGBTQ+ youth are a distinct minority group due to the potential isolation and oppression from their own family members (Friend, 1993). Due to fear of rejection, LGBTQ+ youth are at a greater risk of committing suicide. 40% of transgender and gender expansive youth have attempted to commit suicide within their lifetime, which is nine times the attempt rate of the United States population (Mallon, 1994). More than half of anti-gay violence LGBTQ+ youth experience is from family members (Hunter, 1990). After coming out, relationships between LGBTQ+ youth and their parents decline (Bernstein, 1996). Heteronormative expectations from paternal and maternal figures create conflict for LGBTQ+ youth when attempting to form mature and lasting relationships with family (Knowlton, 1992). Similarly to the concept of grief, there are five stages of familial acceptance of LGBTQ+ youth. The five stages of familial acceptance

of LGBTQ+ youth are subliminal awareness, impact, adjustment, resolution and integration (DeVine 1985).

The first stage is subliminal awareness, when the LGBTQ+ youth feels isolated in their family dynamic, and avoid conversations about LGBTQ+ issues and identities, as well as questions of romantic relationships (DeVine). The second stage immediately follows the LGBTQ+ youth coming out. The stage of impact is when the family is unavoidably aware of their child's LGBTQ+ identity, and they focus on feelings of parental failure, fear for their child and their future, and parental guilt (DeVine). The third stage, adjustment, varies in length depending on how open the family is to LGBTQ+ identities. The family adjusts to the child's identity and accepts that it will not change. During this period of time, parents may bargain with the LGBTQ+ youth, attempting to maintain a heteronormative social image while accepting their child's identity in private (DeVine). The fourth stage is resolution, when a family mourns the loss of their LGBTQ+ youths fantastical heterosexual future (DeVine). Lastly, the fifth and final stage is integration. When family adjusts to the social and emotional realities of having an out LGBTQ+ child (DeVine, 1985). Over time, familial relationships return to the dynamic that existed before an individual's coming out (Bernstein, 1996). LGBTQ+ youth are less likely to face conflict with parental figures if their parents are younger and educated (Bernstein, 1996). When studying the relationship between LGBTQ+ individual's self esteem and familial connection, familial acceptance of an LGBTQ+ individual's identity is a contributor to a positive self-image (Savin-Williams, 1989). When met with an adverse reaction from family after coming out, LGBTQ+ individuals are more likely to revert back to previous gender or sexuality labels out of fear (Maher). Families with stronger religious backgrounds can have more difficulty

accepting LGBTQ+ individuals due to a tradition of homophobia in orthodoxy (Herdt and Boxer, 1993).

In school, LGBTQ+ youth face difficulty fitting in with heteronormative peers (DeVine, 1985). LGBTQ+ youth put a great deal of psychological energy into “passing” as heterosexual in high school, which causes a great deal of distress. Attempting to hide their LGBTQ+ identity can cause students to question their social and emotional relationships, and may result in identity suppression and subsequent heterosexual compensation (Friend, 1993). Identity suppression in LGBTQ+ youth distorts all social and emotional relationships, leading to a greater sense of complete isolation (Mallon, 1994). Many LGBTQ+ youth spend their high school years feeling fearful and confused (Ginsberg, 1996). In order to combat complete seclusion in their identity some LGBTQ+ youth find companionship in anonymous sexual encounters (Mallon, 1994). Coming out socially improves LGBTQ+ youths’ social relationships, and can improve their mental health and self image. LGBTQ+ youth typically first come out to another LGBTQ+ individual, a peer of the same age and sex, with whom they are friendly. LGBTQ+ youth do not see adult support systems, such as teachers and counselors, as allies, and are self-reliant for protection and support (Herdt and Boxer, 1993).

Students’ LGBTQ+ identity and their admission to a Catholic school create a disconnect between the different aspects of their lives, including their relationships with peers, family, school, spirituality and LGBTQ+ identity, because of the disapproval found within religious doctrine. In a report based on the experiences of 25 gay and lesbian alumni of Catholic high schools from the 1980s-1990s, a theme of “dis-integration” emerged (Maher). Contrary to Catholic Social teaching, which is the integration of all aspects of life (ethics, community, spirituality/educating the whole person) with school, students felt aspects of their identity were

dis-integrated with the environment in which they learned because of their isolation from heteronormative experiences (Maher).

The Catholic Magistrate dictates that it is essential for Catholic education to address homosexuality. Catholic schools and faculty are expected to know the Church's teachings on LGBTQ+ individuals, and be equipped to support and address LGBTQ+ identifying students (Coleman 1995). In 1995, the Schools Team of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis created *The Pastoral Care and Sexual Identity Study Group of Saint Paul and Minneapolis*. The Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis supported students in Catholic schools by facilitating materials and discussions on homosexuality for students and training to staff (Gevelinger & Zimmerman, 1997). Support groups such as the ones provided by the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, are vital to the success of LGBTQ+ students throughout highschool (Ginsberg, 1996). Support groups provide LGBTQ+ students with "true friends" within their community. Support groups help students to overcome feelings of isolation and facilitate the development of social skills, as well as a greater sense of self esteem, (Schneider, 1989 and Herdt and Boxer, 1993).

Studies on the experience of LGBTQ+ youth in Catholic education have been conducted, but have found varying results, likely due to the social differences between regions, and the swift change of recent socio-political ideologies. Over a 25 year period, studies of youth in Catholic secondary schools have determined that Catholic school students exhibit more selfless values than youth in alternative high schools (Convey, 1992). Catholic students were found to support women's rights, LGBTQ+ rights, civil rights, and have increasing tolerance of LGBTQ+ identities (McNamara, 1992). Students in Catholic secondary school tend to have a more constructive outlook than non-Catholic school students on LGBTQ+ identities, however, a

majority of Catholic youth in secondary school believe being LGBTQ+ identifying is an unacceptable lifestyle (Maher, 2001, 2004 and Coleman, 1995, 1997). Despite this seemingly contradictory nature, Catholic school students align with the teaching of the Catholic Magistrate, which creates this paradox. Catholic students tend to follow the example of the Catholic magistrate by supporting the dignity of an LGBTQ+ person while simultaneously believing they are leading a sinful life (NCCB Committee on Marriage and Family, 1997). Catholic high schools emphasize community as an integral portion of their culture. In theory, transgender and gender expansive students would thrive in this environment, one that intentionally fosters a sense of community. However, Transgender and Gender Expansive youth experience sequestration in Catholic secondary education, despite the great emphasis placed on community in Catholic institutions (Wolff et al.). Transgender and gender expansive youth experience this isolation because of the ambivalence of the greater community in their response to LGBTQ+ identities. Catholic schools and their communities express this ambivalence through a “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” unspoken policy with faculty and staff (Wolff et al.). This restricts the faculty’s ability to address LGBTQ+ youth, which can lead to consequences, such as job loss, for supportive/allied faculty. Additionally, this unspoken rule villainizes policies on gender expression and LGBTQ+ relationships, despite administrative awareness of LGBTQ+ identities on campus.

The concept of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” implements indistinct policies in order to demoralize and unnerve students into concealing their identity. As a result, transgender and gender expansive students are isolated from their LGBTQ+ peers, manifesting a fear of an individualistic identity among the student body. On Catholic campuses, transgender and gender expansive students struggle with gaining support on campus from affinity groups, like the Queer Straight Alliance (Wolff et al.). Transgender and gender expansive students who have access to a

queer support group on campus, such as a Gay Straight Alliance, experience exclusion from the larger LGBTQ+ community, who focus on the gay experience, which heavily differs from the transgender experience. The LGBTQ+ community lacks campus resources, such as public LGBTQ+ literature and curriculum (Wolff et al.). These policies and confrontations result in an ambivalence surrounding all organized religions .

Catholic secondary education results in transgender and gender expansive individuals and allies expressing disinterest in organized religion due to the villainization of the queer community in Catholic doctrine. Allies and the LGBTQ+ community leave organized religion due to the historical and modern hypocrisy present in doctrine, and the application of such beliefs (Wolff et al.). Those individuals who have a deep sense of spirituality prefer to engage in solitary practice, losing another opportunity to feel a sense of community (Wolff et al.). The trauma that transgender and gender expansive students experience in Catholic schools is exemplified by two testimonies that follow, which demonstrate the creation of an ambivalent relationship with organized religion.

Parker Dell first came out as transgender in 2008, and attended the historically all girls “Cheltenham Ladies College” while identifying as a transgender man. Dell’s parents saw their son’s physical expression of gender shift, as Dell, “ditched [his] feminine clothing and started wearing copious amounts of Lynx body spray,” accompanied by a short haircut (Dell). Dell’s parents saw their son’s change as a looming threat, and decided to send him to a female, historically single sex boarding school (Dell). Dell describes the experience as “[feeling] like a punishment for rebelling against [his] assigned gender” (Dell). Attending Cheltenham Ladies College meant that Dell was subjected to a compulsory school uniform that “was fitted to every contour of [his] awkward post-pubertal form. Pinstripe blue trousers were cut to accentuate the

hips, [his] least favorite feature on [him]self (Dell).” The rigidity of gender presentation at Cheltenham, as embodied in the school uniform, made Dell vulnerable to gender dysphoria.

Gender dysphoria, as defined by the Mayo Clinic is “the feeling of discomfort or distress that might occur in people whose gender identity differs from their sex assigned at birth (Mayo Clinic).” Gender dysphoria is a common experience for transgender and gender non-conforming individuals, which is amplified by dress code requirements in professional and educational settings. The validity of a dress code policy in educational settings has been a contentious social debate in the 21st century (Migdon). Many transgender youth, such as Parker Dell, have found that dress codes are exclusionary and back transgender people into a proverbial corner. Studies show that 93% of dress codes from schools in the United States, “contain rules with subjective language,” such as the adjectives ‘revealing’ or ‘immodest,’ in an attempt to shame students, typically female and those who identify outside of the gender binary, and allow for interpretation of the dress code between faculty members (Migdon). A purposefully vague dress code is a dangerous concept that unjustly targets young women and weaponizes the dress code against gender expansive students. 15% of schools in the United States have dress code policies that address students specifically based on their biological sex; one such policy states that “no fingernail polish or makeup is allowed on male students (GLAAD Media Reference Guide - Nonbinary People).” In order to combat gender dysphoria, transgender students may know what specific clothes feel comfortable to present in, but those clothes may be prohibited in their school’s dress code. For many, loose fitting clothing is incredibly important in order to feel comfortable. However, 46% of dress code policies, “prohibit clothing that is ‘too loose (Migdon).” How loose is too loose? That is up to the discretion of the teacher. Transgender and Non-binary students are reportedly disciplined at higher rates than their cisgender peers for dress

code violations (Migdon). The rate of schools that institute gender rigid dress code policies has been steadily increasing since 2019 (Migdon).

Parker Dell was not alone in experiencing gender dysphoria during secondary school. Felix Lecocq was in his third year of secondary school, when he began to experience gender dysphoria. Lecocq recounts his story as, “not a stereotypical trans narrative (Lecocq).” Lecocq grew up liking dresses, the color pink, and regarding gender as a “fact of life (Lecocq).” Lecocq attended primary school at a historically all girls institution in the United Kingdom. For secondary school Lecocq chose to attend a historically all girls institution while identifying as a girl (Lecocq). Lecocq reflects on his first two years at secondary school as feeling “obnoxiously happy (Lecocq).” Lecocq describes his sudden shift in gender confidence as “Something [that] started to feel off (Lecocq).” Lecocq’s gender dysphoria manifested emotionally and Lecocq became “irritable to the point of outright hostility (Lecocq).” Due to the gender dysphoria he experienced, Lecocq struggled to complete homework assignments and keep up attendance in school (Lecocq).

Parker Dell similarly struggled in school. In an attempt to explore his gender identity, and stave off his gender dysphoria, Dell dyed his hair in order to mimic the character ‘Sick Boy’ from the film *Trainspotter* (Dell). Dell’s attempt at gender exploration led to him being suspended from school; unnatural hair color was against the Cheltenham dress code (Dell). Dell and Lecoiq both reflect on the negative impacts of attending a historically all girls school, highlighting their diminished Mental Health as a result of attending a historically same-sex institution, without readily available examples of masculinity (Dell). The dress code enforced at both schools exacerbated their gender dysphoria, due to the lack of freedom of self-expression they experienced. Both men finish reflecting on their Secondary School experiences, convinced

that if they could choose where they attended secondary school again, they would never choose a single-sex institution (Dell, Lecocq). These narratives demonstrate the power that dress codes and uniforms have over students, and the personal relationship between self-expression and self esteem.

Hair is an incredibly important aspect of personal expression that is referenced in dress code policies and its restriction can negatively impact TGE youth. The relationship between hair and identity is biblical. According to Corinthians, for catholic women, gender expression through long hair was praised as a symbol of glory and spirituality (Ellery). The personal relationship between hair and self-esteem continued past biblical times and throughout history. In the early 1920s 'flappers' cut their hair shorter in order to rebel against the rigid ideals of feminine gender expression. Flappers were met with cultural backlash, claiming that the cut was 'too masculine' and therefore made a woman no longer feminine or appealing (Ellery). In 1940s France, women's heads were shaved as a way to publicly humiliate and strip them of their femininity if they slept with a German Soldier (Ellery). In 1950s China, women donned "Liberation hairdos", which were a symbol of personal freedom in femininity, similarly to the flapper movement (Ellery). These examples demonstrate how hair has always been a vehicle for gender identity and expression. Regulating hair limits personal expression, and therefore personal freedom. For many minorities physical expression, especially through hair, is a cultural identifier (Ellery). Specific haircuts, colors and hairstyles are a signal between LGBTQ+ people of their identity. In gender theory this phenomenon is referred to as flagging (Bauer). Flagging is a result of Queer oppression; it rose in the 1970s after a rise in sodomy laws in the United States (Bauer). Flagging is how queer people find each other without endangering themselves in unsupportive spaces. This is one of the most significant areas of need among dress code legislation. LGBTQ+ flagging

protects young queer students from the danger of rejection among peers. Private schools promote professionalism and the ideal of uniformity, however, over the last generation the value of visual professionalism has decreased drastically (Migdon). The importance of these ideals are far outweighed by the damage policies restricting hair can inflict. Hair policies in secondary schools are a significant example of the impact dress codes can have on the student body.

Survey

This survey is a selective sample of ninety nine current students between the ages 14-19 who attend Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy, and was sent out as an optional survey to the entire Flintridge Sacred Heart student body. This survey was created and analyzed through Google Forms, to gauge the perspective of the student body on gender representation at Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy. The questions contained within the survey are based on the literature above, and the researcher's own reflections on the environment at Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy. The questions were created to be appropriate for the audience and to deliver the type of information needed to discuss the researcher's hypothesis. In order to understand the background of those responding to the survey, the first eight questions (of the 20 total) are demographic questions: ethnicity, biological sex, gender identity and pronouns. The following six questions seek to establish the school environment of the respondents. The last six questions are on gender representation and school policies and legislation.

This researcher hypothesized that historically single sex institutions have a negative impact on transgender and gender expansive individual's identity formation. The results of this survey confirmed this hypothesis based on the amalgamation of responses in the school environment and school policies, and legislation sections of the survey. For this survey the

hypothesis was not asked directly due to the concern that a direct question of the hypothesis would lead to politically polarized responses. For clarity, political polarization includes mock answers that do not productively answer the questions of the survey e.g. “I identify as an attack helicopter,” “Why can’t I just be a girl?” ect.

Three statistics prove the hypothesis correct: 11.1% identify as transgender or gender expansive, 10% of the respondents use non-cisgender pronouns, and 23.3% identify as non-allies of the LGBTQ+ community. 11.1% of the student body identify as transgender or gender expansive demonstrating how small this community is within the student body. This is significant because the size of the community is directly proportional to the communal support and visibility, which would positively affect an individual's experience in school. While 11.1% identify as transgender or gender expansive, only 10% of the respondents use non-cisgender pronouns. This discrepancy, between those who identify as transgender or gender expansive and use non-cisgender pronouns, demonstrates the fear in the student body to be open about their gender identity. Furthermore 23.3% of the school community self-identify as non-allies to the LGBTQ+ community, demonstrating the antagonistic attitude that this community experiences from peers.

Other major findings of this survey are as follows. 32.3% of the student body identify as LGBTQ+ or questioning. This is significant because 21.2% identify as LGBTQ+ members who are cisgender or questioning, and may or may not feel a historically single-sex institution is the right place to explore their gender identity or sexual orientation. 26.7% of the student body feel transgender and gender expansive students are not visible in the student body on campus. This relates back to the previous question, as students may not feel comfortable to express their identities in this environment resulting in a lack of visibility. 58.3% of the school either

somewhat do not agree or do not agree at all with the idea that there is supporting legislation for gender expansive students. This is significant, as there are gender supportive protocols surrounding name and pronoun changes on campus that students are unaware of, and therefore can not take advantage of. 19.8% of the school falsely believes that there is policy in the handbook that addresses this community. Some students falsely believe there is a far more extensive legislative system present on campus, which results in complacency with the current administrative response and policies. 8.2% of the student body either disagree somewhat or completely with the statement that the uniform provides adequate options to express gender identity. Despite the existence of both a skirt and pants option in uniforms, students feel the dress code still overly regulates methods of self expression that accurately reflect the student's identity. 2% of responses were derogatory or categorically incorrect ('why can't I just be a girl?', 'straight.' in response to gender identity questions).

The following recommendations for historically single sex institutions are based on the results of this survey and gender care theory. Regarding dress code, gender dysphoria is a common experience for transgender and gender expansive (TGE) youth, which is amplified by dress code requirements in professional and educational settings (Nation). Many TGE youth have found that dress codes back them into a proverbial corner. Dress codes with subjective language attempt to shame students, typically non-man, and allow for subjective interpretation of the dress code between faculty members (Migdon). Purposefully vague dress codes are dangerous policies that unnerve students into complacency. In order to combat gender dysphoria, transgender students may know what specific clothes feel comfortable to present in. With a strict dress code those clothes may be prohibited. The dress code recommendations are as follows: all gendered pronouns should be changed to gender neutral ones; phrases such as, "personal dignity"

“respect they have for themselves” “freedom to concentrate without distraction,” should be removed as these phrases have an underlying message of shame, the entire section devoted to hair should be removed, and this researcher included a note terms that require a definition, as they are too vague to be consistently (and therefore non-discriminatorily) applied, for example modesty, clean, inappropriate, etc.

Regarding institutional policies, at Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy specifically, the Student Parent Handbook utilizes she/her pronouns 67 times and rarely uses gender neutral terms to refer to students. This researcher’s edit of the handbook best reflects the student body by honoring Flintridge Sacred Heart’s past as a historically single sex school, and the current gender diverse student population. The edits to the handbook include alterations of pronouns into gender neutral terms, a rewrite of the dress code (see above), a newly included transgender and gender expansive student address, and rewrites of the mission statement, history, and portrait of a sacred heart graduate. The transgender and gender expansive student address reassures students that Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy understands that highschool is a time of development, and if a student enters and exits highschool with a different gender identity, the school will support that individual as a student during their time of development. The rewrites of the mission statement, school history, and portrait of a sacred heart graduate included the neutralization of all gendered terms and language, and an addition to the history that acknowledges Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy is a historically all-girls institution, but is adapting to the nuances of the gender spectrum.

Limitations

In the creation of this research paper the sample size of the School Policy and Identity survey was small and therefore did not represent the entire student body. A future research endeavor into this topic could include interviews of the current TGE students in the Policy and Identity Survey. Research could also be conducted into the student handbooks of alternative local high schools to compare and indict the discrepancies between dress codes. This comparison could provide an example of the gender based targeting prevalent in all school dress codes. This document could improve with current administrative testimony on the anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment in the catholic church and religious secondary schools. Flintridge Sacred Heart is privileged enough to have a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion coordinator as a part of their permanent staff. Utilizing this resource to begin a discourse on dress codes would be a benefit to this research due to her expertise. Finally, conducting a seminar in the senior gender studies classes on the discrepancies in dress code would create discourse among peers and provide a student perspective.

Reflection

As a student researcher working on this paper, one of the obstacles I faced was the conflict between my role as a student and my role as a researcher. Casting a critical eye on the policies of an institution I currently attend felt like a conflict of interest, due to my hierarchical relationship to the administrative body. After delivering a presentation to the general school community that was well received, one of my presentation slides as well as my face was posted on social media. Through the school's social media, I was harassed by a transphobic individual outside the Flintridge Sacred Heart community. As a second conflict of interest, my personal identity and the nature of my research were strongly linked to my emotional well being. As this research was being conducted at a historically single sex catholic school, I was limited in my

speech by myself and good-intentioned administrators in order to protect current policies from transphobic community members and the archdiocese. While the above recommendations and literature are a start to diversity, equity and inclusion, there is still a lot of community work to be done. As anti-trans legislation piles up in the U.S. it is hard for the transgender and gender expansive community to keep its head above water. These suggestions are intended to be adopted by school communities to offer all students, regardless of gender, a safe haven.

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