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Researching and Working for Transgender Youth: Contexts, Problems and Solutions

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Abstract: In May 2016, two events epitomized the complexities of working for global transgender youth rights. First, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) hosted a ministerial event in which education ministers from around the world released a call to action for protection of students on the basis of their gender identity and expression in schools. Second, the United Nations (UN) hosted an event celebrating the family, attended by conservative ministers and activists who mobilized family protectionist discourse against transgender students. This article contemplates, in light of transgender activist Raewyn Connell's Southern Theory contributions, the complexity of global research and work for transgender youth. It considers key informant interviews with 50 stakeholders in the global push for transgender student rights in education, including members of government and non-government organisations, and academics from Northern and Southern countries. Problems in aiding transgender youth at the global level included safety concerns, the impacts of conservative advocates and media backlash (within family and national protectionist discourses), cultural complexities hampering engagement and translation, dissemination hindrances pertaining to established publishing biases, and financial and collaboration barriers. Solutions including virtual work; multi-level leadership; alliance-building; representation; visibility of transgender youth citizenship and family membership; and legal, financial and capacity-building aid are considered.

Keywords: transgender; youth; research; global; south; north

1. Introduction

Since 2010, education rights advocates from around the world united to push for recognition of gender identity and expression as protected grounds in international human rights legislation—and succeeded [1]. As an Australian sociologist whose research is focused on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) policy issues, I have been part of this international movement in an advisory capacity with various United Nations (UN) organisations, international governments and non-government organisations. In 2011 the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon called transphobic bullying in schools globally “*a moral outrage, a grave violation to human rights and a public health crisis*” [2] underscoring the widespread personal and physical consequences to transgender students from the discrimination and violence they are subjected to in schools around the world [3–6]. The UN started to prioritise education rights issues around gender identity; 200 UN Member States convened for “Stop Bullying—Ending Violence and Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity” and the *Born free and equal* policy [7] was released. UNESCO’s “First International Consultation on Homophobic Bullying in Educational Institutions” in Brazil was attended by governments and researchers from all global regions (including myself), who created education policy guidelines [8,9]. The Global Network Against Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying in Schools (the Global Network) was formed and met at least annually, promoting policy goals [10]. Other global and regional

bodies (e.g., the World Health Organisation, the European Union) also promoted implementation. Some nation-states, including Australia, reformed their legislation in response to the international pressure (e.g., Australia's Sex Discrimination Act now includes protection against discrimination on the basis of gender identity in schools). Several—including the USA, UK, Australia and others—actively engaged in diplomatic pressure, boycotts and aid restriction to further promote the global policy beyond their own nation-states' bounds [11,12]. However, even within these states there has been some backlash, such as in the bitterly intense 2016 attacks on the Australian Safe Schools Program in Australian parliament and media with the particular focus these attacks have had on transgender students' rights and the way the program encourages disruption of gender restrictions to uniforms or bathroom use in special cases [13–15]. There was similar backlash in the USA over North Carolina's protections for transgender students' preferred bathroom use. Other nation states—e.g., Russia, Uganda, Nigeria—have even outlawed related education advocacy altogether, initially resisting external interference [16–19].

The intensity of the global debate on transgender students is illustrated by the contrasting existence of two key United Nations events held on 17 May 2016. The first was UNESCO's "#OutInTheOpen International Ministerial Meeting: Education Sector Responses to Violence based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity/Expression", at which I chaired a roundtable. This event was funded by Ministries of Education in the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Chili, which have been instrumental in progressing LGBTI rights issues in recent years. It was attended by Ministers, high-level government officials, UNESCO representatives, global and state non-government organisation directors, academics and other civil society from all global regions (Asia-Pacific, Europe, North and South America, the Middle East and Africa)—and some transgender students helped as hosts. It featured research-based plenary speeches on the frequent nature of abuse of transgender students globally and the severity of impacts on their lives, and the launch of a report on strengthening education-sector responses to the violence against these students globally [20]. It inspired Ministers from around the world to sign a "Call to Action" affirming their political commitment to ensure the right to education in a safe environment for all learners regardless of gender identity or expression. However that same day the New York UN headquarters hosted "Uniting Nations for a Family Friendly World." This event was sponsored by anti-trans groups like the Center for Family and Human Rights (C-Fam, formerly known as the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute) and Family Watch International (focused on removing GLBTIQ-friendly language from international policy statements). It was co-sponsored by the 25 countries of the Group of Friends of the Family (GoFF)—a coalition of UN member states created in 2015 to save religious liberty from sexuality and gender-identity based rights pushes; although many were unconcerned about non-Christian or non-Muslim religious liberties not dominant in their contexts (indeed, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Russia, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Malaysia, Egypt, and Iraq attendees were from the countries most lowly ranked in the world for protecting religious liberties, [21]). Belarus Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Valentin Rybakov tried to push Goff's "Statement in Support of the Family", expressing disappointment in the UN's "attempts to withdraw the theme of the family (...) for the sake of controversial issues" [22]. NGO representatives resistant to transgender rights from the religious right-wing attended—Family Rights Council, Family Watch International, Human Life International, CitizenGo, HazteOir, Institute for Family Policy, anti-marriage equality activists and anti-trans pastors—and posited the (re)appropriation of *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* to assert heteronormative models of the family and its rights over children's lives (read, their gender expression) as "entitled to protection by society and the State" [23]. C-Fam's Austin Ruse praised the dictatorships of Sudan and Saudi Arabia for "saving" UN documents from unwanted language changes opening up definitions of family (beyond heteronormative models).

Despite the existence of such complex global policy contexts and such contradictory human rights legislation usage, research on transgender students has only been pursued via a national paradigm. Such research has privileged the nation-state, its mechanisms and policies, in mainly

positivist critical reviews of whether policy protection “exists” or not and critical evaluations hailing interventions’ successes through surveys of students. Studies have been conducted mainly in Western contexts by disparate, relatively unconnected researchers and non-government organisations: USA’s Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) [6] and the UK’s Stonewall [24] found the majority of transgender students face discrimination at school; Australian researchers [25,26] have found that although transgender students faced increased risks in schools compared to same-sex attracted students, they also engaged in increased education activism. Beyond such contexts, research is characterised by absence, or risk. In many countries the non-discrimination protections and academic freedoms of liberal Northern democracies (and universities) do not exist; over 70 countries criminalise homosexuality which itself problematizes the whole question of research. Local academics may face vilification, violence, or risk to their job, freedom or life (which may even be endorsed or led by government) in studying GLBTIQ themes. This risk means there is a general absence of research. Where research does occur, there are often limitations imposed on the sample size and the locations studied as a way of managing risk; Nigerian researcher Thaibo Msibi [27] managed the risk of studying students’ experiences of homophobia by basing his study in South Africa, not Nigeria—but his sample was small due to a lack of contacts in that context. Small sampling and international aid is typical of available work in Namibia, Lesotho, South Africa, Nigeria, Mozambique or Swaziland [18,28]. Fiji, Cambodia, Vietnam, Japan and others in the Asia Pacific have also had some (limited and carefully bargained for) research into violence and abuse stimulated by international aid organisations—particularly UNESCO [4] who have called on the capacity-building consultation of foreign researchers like myself from Australia, and Human Rights Watch which called on the skills of foreign researcher Boris Dittrich from The Netherlands [29]. No study has considered the complexity of this global research and work on transgender students. This article aims to identify the key problems in global research and work on transgender students, in light of transgender activist Raewyn Connell’s Southern Theory contributions, and key informant interviews with 50 stakeholders in the global push for transgender student rights in education. Several problems and possible solutions are outlined.

2. Southern Queer Perspectives and Key Informant Interviews

This study adapted elements of transgender activist Raewyn Connell’s *Southern Theory* (2007), which critiqued the colonialist history of the field of sociology and the way it has privileged contributions from the “North” (contexts which evince a dual condition of political autonomy/imperialism and relative economic sufficiency) and overlooked key contributions from the “South” (contexts which evince dual condition of coloniality/postcoloniality and insufficient resources for the majority despite any superfluities for minorities) [30,31]. She argued this lead to biases in the conceptualization, aims, questions, methodologies, methods and results of sociological research. She noted that there was however no strict binary between North/South perspectives—Norths exist within Souths in particular regions, Northern influences impact Southern perspectives and the reverse [30,31]. Connell’s work has been cast as a potential new seminal theoretical text in the field of sociology particularly in Australia [32–36], and has also been embraced by some academics in South Africa in the foregrounding of local theorists like Ben Kies [37]. It was praised for opening up the potential for more genuine democratic global dialogue on research [36], perhaps even integrative approaches [34,38]. However, I post that “consensus-based approaches” can be difficult to achieve where colonial dynamics are in play; and posit a goal of pluralist comparison instead. In critiquing Connell’s work, some writers have been careful to underline the need for researchers to seek out more female and indigenous peoples’ contributions to research concerns [35,39], and to highlight the lack of institutional infrastructures in the South as an obstacle research efforts [34]. Few education scholars have taken up Connell’s call for Southern Theory ([40–42]; [43], pp. 1–15; [44]), and existing efforts fall short of actually deploying Southern voices about research obstacles and complexities. This project attempted to draw upon hitherto underexplored regionally-based intellectual resources in Africa and Eastern Europe particularly, amongst others, to explore the complexities of work and research on transgender students.

Dennis Altman, Michael Warner and Jon Binnie have all argued that global sexual pandemics which widely impacted transgender communities, are a catalyst for governments realising they can no longer stay silent on gender diversity issues once allocated to “private” individualist rather than public collective realms of ethics and morality—casting HIV as a kind of metaphor for globalization of awareness [45–47]. Both Altman and Warner questioned the relevance of Anglo-generated Queer theory to people in Southern contexts on the basis of the more pressing basic needs in Southern peoples’ conditions [46,48]. Peter Drucker joined Altman in rejecting Queer theorization of the fluidity of gender identities and similarly took up the liberationist concept of global gay and transgender identity; focusing on convergences of identity in his denouncement of Robert Mugabe’s persecution of sexual and gender minorities in Zimbabwe [49]. Drucker suggested that those from Northern countries should, in shared struggle, comment on and intervene in discrimination in Southern contexts. However the framework of a cogent LGBT culture and population with shared perspectives has been challenged to a limited extent from Southern postcolonial and indigenist perspectives on HIV education, marriage law and films for example [50–52]. Chang [50] particularly argued a (Northern) focus on marriage rights as a form of neocolonialism dominates global LGBT activism. Further, geographer Jon Binnie critiqued Altman’s creation of the “other” to global gay or transgender subjects within his assertion of a cosmopolitan discourse [47,53]—where those with non-realised diverse LGBT identities were to be cast as duped by their own lack of consciousness and localised cultures [47]. Binnie writes of a “general failure (...) to adequately address questions of nationalism” [47], arguing that Queer Theory and post-modernism have more to offer accounts of globalisation than liberationists like Altman, Warner, and Drucker allowed. He argues that Queer and the post-modern embrace both the diverse contexts and cyber contexts of which global engagements are composed [47], whilst allowing for both overlapping and locally specific identities and needs. Ultimately the problem with current writing on globalization (and even Binnie’s work) is that it has largely stemmed from white gay male academics focused on topics and metaphors most relevant to themselves (travel, HIV, cosmopolitan discourse, consumerism, etc.). There was a need for global work to be extended to the interests of people of diverse nationalities and gender identities, and particularly youth issues and education, and the urgent issues of discrimination and violence.

Therefore, in aiming to review the problems for research and work on transgender students globally and transnationally, this project actively sought input from Southern key informants as well as Northern key informants, women and those of other identifications as well as men, indigenous individuals as well as cosmopolitan travelers for whom the world itself was home. In total 50 semi-structured interviews were conducted (thus far) at and around global networking events in Dublin, Stockholm, New York, Paris, Krakow and Johannesburg across 2014–2016. Informants were identified through their involvement in organisations engaged in UNESCO and United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Global Networks covering gender identity and expression in education (and their own work in the area), and through their presence in the selected pre-approved cities for related events (these were all “protected contexts” where transgender issues could be safely discussed). Informants received no payment and included education ministers, government members, civil society leadership, directors and employees of non-government organisations, and academics who had all worked towards the generation or promotion of research or work on transgender students (mainly in secondary schooling, but sometimes in primary schooling). They represented a diverse range of global regions, contextual categories, relevant occupations and gender identities (see Table 1). Interviews usually took place in booked rooms or spaces selected by participants, and in some cases via the phone or email, and usually lasted one hour. Only the author conducted interviews, and all interviews were recorded (interviewees had the option of not being recorded). All interviewees were aged over 18. Ethical approval for this work was received firstly from the University of New England’s Human Research Ethics Committee for the pilot (HE14-005, from 2014) and secondly La Trobe’s Human Research Ethics Committee for the main project (HEC16-021, from 2016). Key informant interview transcripts were not deposited in a publicly available database due to the need for anonymity for some

participants, particularly for those from contexts where advocacy around gender diversity in schools may be socially reprehended. Any use of identifiers (e.g., name vs. pseudonym, country vs. region, specific vs. general role information) was negotiated with individual participants. The interview questions considered here were those focused on difficulties for research and work on transgender students only (whether at the global or local level), and possible solutions. Connell's "dirty theory" approach to thematic coding is applied in analysis, in my effort to upraise Southern, female and transgender concerns for example as part of the overall internationalist sociology of voices on this work grouped loosely together by internal thematic analysis of responses, rather than to impose external analysis upon these concerns or amalgamate them within Northern perspectives. This is an approach to theorising that: (1) seeks to generalize in a thematic manner but always in light of the contextual specificity; (2) avoids privileging existing dominant constructions of practice; (3) reports practice themes in dialogue with more marginalized localized approaches and their histories.

Table 1. General traits of Key Informants.

Africa	Asia-Pacific	North and South America	Middle East	Europe
8	11	11	6	14
Global South			Global North	
30			20	
Civil society leadership/staff	Government members/staff	Education ministers/leadership/teachers/counsellors	Non-government organization directors/staff	Academics
5	9	11	15	10
Male and male/masculine identifying		Female and female/feminine identifying		Non-binary/genderqueer
25		20		5

3. Results

This section is divided into loosely grouped thematic subheadings for comments on problems for research and work on transgender student issues, and comments on potential solutions (generalized in a thematic manner following Connell's "dirty theory" approach). Northern and Southern considerations are teased out where possible, as are dynamics for transnational vs. local work, to ensure the contextual and historical specificity needed for dirty theory work. Southern considerations are specifically privileged where word count limited discussions, to avoid privileging dominant Northern constructions of practice seen in the policy development processes and to ensure dialogue with more marginalized approaches.

3.1. Problems

3.1.1. Safety Concerns

The overwhelming majority of (45) informants, particularly Southern participants, emphasised safety concerns as primary barriers to research and work on transgender youth across global, regional and local contexts. For Southern participants safety concerns particularly involved the risk to employment, social acceptance and even their own life. A non-government organization (NGO) worker from Pakistan commented. "Research and activism in education is not an easy prospect in the South because you become known; murder and rape and discrimination are a reality for transgender adults, not only students." She explained that her local Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province had had five transgender activists killed in the last five months; most recently "Alisha (of Trans Action Alliance Pakistan) who was only 25 years old." This created a climate of fear around engaging in transgender research and support work and created difficulties, but also concomitantly spurred her on to value it more. An informant from Egypt, a nation unusual in the Arab region for its legal provisions for transgender transition, explained that transgender people were seen as having a medical mental health

problem and this tended to be socially stigmatized to the point that it would be hard for young people to pursue treatment living with their families. “The medical view is good for sympathy, but bad for study as the stigma is strong and freedom of expression is restricted. So I see critical American studies discussed (sometimes there), but it would be unsafe to study young transgender Egyptians critically.” The informant added that “locally the topic is for doctors, for adults only” and that transgender people can be harassed by the police and media.

3.1.2. Conservative Advocacy/Media Backlash

Conservative political and/or religious advocacy and media backlash for research and work on transgender youth seemed to be felt at the regional and local levels more than at the global level (in 33 informants’ comments). UNESCO Global Coordinator for HIV and AIDS Chris Castle (from the USA and Britain) said that the Rio Statement of 2011 and the various education sector response documents (which included research on transgender youth) had not engendered any media backlash for UNESCO itself; “Everyone used to say that to cover Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity issues the sky would literally fall and we would be black-listed from global networking; really there has been no backlash to UNESCO for creating those documents.” However it was different at the regional and local level, particularly in the global South. Even in a rich peripheral South of Australia in 2016 just prior to a federal election, a non-government worker explained “The Safe Schools Coalition”—which works to protect transgender kids’ wellbeing in schools through resource aid—and related research on transgender youth “was featured in over 300 features in conservative media (including right-wing newspaper *The Australian*) in response to agitation from the Australian Christian Lobby, Family Voice, and groups specifically working against transgender youth rights.” Australian researchers of transgender youth were grilled in the media over whether or not they had ethical approval from their universities to survey and interview kids aged from 14 about their gender identity and transphobia experiences in schools in an effort to discredit their findings, “but it didn’t work as they had ethical approval and were very high-status academics.” Researchers in even loosely related areas were also labelled “either Marxists, biased pro-LGBT feminists or pedophilia pushers—that latter label was applied to a particular researcher in a research center that produced most of the work on transgender youth, but they got members of parliament to say it under parliamentary protection so the researcher could not sue.” An Australian informant and several others believed transnational conservative activism was to blame for certain types of backlash in their contexts, “We’ve always had conservatives like the Festival of the Light extremists advocating against us, but only in early 2016 did they campaign in an organized manner after being trained by globally-oriented USA-funded groups. They used less extreme media messaging, provided quotes and data.” These organisations used both Family Protectionist and Nation Protectionist Discourse Tactics—chiefly asserting that heteronormative “families” or alternately, traditional nationalist citizenship identities, were the “real” victims in LGBT peoples’ rights pushes.

In Russia the media focus was similarly protectionist but more squarely on national identity in a period of expansionism during attempts to take-over the Ukraine, emphasizing how being Russian was in part “supposedly about being appalled by LGBT people and the tolerance seen in places like the Ukraine and the global bodies defending it” a Russian academic explained. “Although there is gang violence against transgender and homosexual people, the motivation is this idea of international propaganda on rights as abuse to a Russian child rather than concern over what adults do in a gay bar”, The academic explained. “So researching young transgender people could get more backlash, more names in papers, due to these complex national defense perspectives. Even a survey (not face-to-face)—may be called propaganda, grooming.” The discourse ironically positioned Russia as in defense of citizens’ identity, despite the country actually attacking both the Ukraine and LGBT rights. In Uganda an education worker explained a combination of National and Family protectionist approaches, and religion, were being mobilized to harm LGBT locals “with widely known American input and funding.” Research on some young transgender peoples’ experiences was being provided to

a small extent by organisations like Sexual Minorities Uganda, but “there is so much more funding for the conservative Family organisations and churches from America, and the Vatican, who wish to expand their influence further into our country.”

3.1.3. Cultural and Language Complexities

Key informants involved in transnational work (through UNESCO’s international research outreach for example) or work in Southern regions or countries particularly talked about cultural and language complexities as barriers to research and support work (21 informants’ comments). They explained that conceptualisations of gender variance differed greatly from context to context, in ways that made identifying terms for transgender youth difficult to discern and the concept of transphobia (as opposed to other more basic gender-based or difference-based bias) complicated to identify. UNESCO Project Coordinator Christophe Cornu from France explained, “you have to work out which right to embed LGBT youth rights in which will cause the least conflict, confusion and resistance (...) What works in the north is not what works in the South necessarily, and a lot of Northern activists do not realize this.” He said this cultural and language complexity is why UNESCO used the non-controversial right to education when working with all regions on the First UNESCO Policy Consultation on Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying in Rio in 2011, and the rights of the child rather than a specific gender identity or expression based right when encouraging research and support work in Kenya in 2013 and other African and South American countries. “We introduced the concept of gender identity and initially our African partners were shocked”, Christophe explained, “when they finally understood that transgender issues were about protecting the *rights of children* (including gender diverse kids) to identity, there was a huge shift in their thinking.”

A male researcher who had contributed to a study in the African region on general and transgender youth, around homophobia and transphobia in schools, explained that the words “transgender” and “transphobia” were not precisely used in the study. “There were difficulties in phrasing questions in ways which would allow students to identify themselves or others as transgender”, he said. “We used ‘students who were different in how they express their gender’ and we piloted it to ensure the kids would know it was about gender nonconformity, as other local terms were slang or offensive or related to gender-based (male-female) violence.” Australian, American and European researchers and civil society workers who had helped develop research efforts transnationally in the Asia-pacific had similar problems; one of these informants expanded, “both the researchers I was aiding and the participants confused transgender themes with general gender (femininity and masculinity) and homosexuality.” In Viet Nam data an informant explained it was “easier to compare the privileging of masculine students including minorities generally (males, masculine lesbians, and FtM transgender people) over feminine people generally, than to distinguish whether kids were specifically transgender people due to language barriers.” Thailand data on the other hand offered much clearer terminologies around gender (such as local terms for lady-boys), as the country had greater historic cultural recognition for transgender identities than most in Asia. A young Thai transgender activist reflected that the way transphobia operated in Thailand could be difficult to capture in data, “negative attitudes are found in the explanation for why I exist, some believe all ladyboys were men who cheated on their wives in a past life ... so men sort of judge me less especially if they like many girls, but may think my existence is my punishment ... so if transgender youth say they are treated well in a study, does it really mean they are?”. A fafafine’ activist from the pacific explained that “studying transgender youth in New Zealand, Samoa and certain island nations would not be complex because of language as we have local terms, but because transphobia is subtler and different.” Transgender identities were available sometimes for practical purposes (because a family lacked a daughter for example) so discrimination—although it existed—did not work in quite the same way in those contexts and sometimes related more to restrictive lifestyle options.

3.1.4. Publishing Barriers and Biases

Key informants from many contexts cited difficulties in publishing research or related work on transgender youth (17 informants' comments). Several Ministers and government workers discussed varying complexities in getting words like "transgender" into print the first time, whilst several researchers discussed how only certain types of authors were published and only certain journals or articles were accepted on transgender youth. For example, Dr. Joe Kosciw of USA's GLSEN explained that despite GLSEN researchers all being fully qualified with PhDs to study transgender youth, there are biases against researchers based in NGOs "in the US the researchers are usually more distinct from NGOs and inhabit academies, so in the LGBT movement it is rare to have a concentrated research effort—there was a turf war with academics initially." Over the last 15 years Kosciw and other GLSEN researchers' work has become published not only in the NGO's monographs but to appear in peer-reviewed international journals of note. Several researchers discussed how big, highly ranked general education and health journals did not publish critical work on transgender youth as often and were only interested in framing them as a "medical problem" (some informants had even been sent rejection emails by editors of specific directly stating this). Southern participants particularly noted the problems of publishing in dominant colonising languages like English rather than one's native tongue were further complicated by the complex words and gender-pronouns used by transgender youth—an African researcher said "taking on a co-author from another context means the English is improved, but you may get demoted on the author list." Southern participants also noted concerns about responses to their dissemination. Even researchers in rich peripheral Souths where English was widely spoken like Australia and Canada had concerns about dissemination, mainly about how audiences manifested more frequently for sensational and simple work. An Australian said "Now we are taking lines out of talks, holding back papers, marking drafts 'confidential' because our right-wing press jump on any sensational line on transgender kids for political reasons . . . but they ignore our deeper reflections on them, our theorization of what they bring." A Canadian academic reflected "If academics use statistics about trans kids people listen, if we use Queer theory or something too disruptive . . . our voices echo unheard by outside our ivory towers." Generally there were few accepted tropes of transgender youth which could be disseminated; others that were less publishable or shared only amongst "insiders".

3.1.5. Financial and Collaboration Issues

Fifteen informants' comments—mainly Southern participants—emphasised a lack of employment opportunities and funding in research and activism on transgender youth in their local and regional areas, although there were a few who explained the rare opportunities for money and travel available particularly from funders in the North to some "elite/star" individuals (only). This generally meant engaging in collaborative agreements which had their own particular limitations. Working with funders in education organisations meant greater access and aid, but more conservative limitations and concern about institutional reputations. Working with funders in community was complicated because funds were limited and community organisations might have agendas seen as radical by educators. Working with international allies meant that "across Africa certain rights champions get trained in foreign ways, celebrated for that and then get all the funds and travel opportunities." They reflected, "this takes funding from the grass roots groups, and means that individual leaves their old grass roots thinking and contacts—so especially essential to work for black transgender young people at the intersections of grass roots movements—behind" said a South African NGO worker, who felt funding should be directed to grass roots groups rather than individual champions. It was, understandably, difficult for individuals from Southern contexts to explain their complex collaboration issues at the regional and global level directly without harming those relations—one NGO worker in their twenties anonymously said "transgender youth are not always given a direct voice or invited to consultation and planning at the global or regional level." Further, they were concerned that "a research document or high end statement about transgender youth will be prepared without us and handed

out at those events long after there was any chance for us to comment on it. I'm not attacking the work; I'm saying we want a say."

3.2. Solutions

3.2.1. Virtual Work

Both Northern and Southern participants discussed the value of online research and outreach models (in 38 informants' comments). African, Asian, American, and European education ministers, researchers, teachers and activists had all discussed how they had been able to use the internet as a way to share resources and find resources. In Asia several informants described how some of the first LGBT youth studies ever had occurred online in recent years through surveys inspired by global networking opportunities, borrowing from foreign models and contributing their own local concerns. One Asian researcher explained, "there is a level of anonymity and safety for the participant and the researcher online, and there are models in other researchers' work which means our work can be compared." A Swaziland education worker mentioned the local "Fortress" program for LGBT youth and also commented, "The internet allows us to reach beyond where we can walk, drive or fly. Yesterday I emailed a link to a Nigerian LGBT youth survey online to my networks, to grow their participant numbers." An Australian researcher explained that sometimes it is possible to gain "access to transgender young people online whom one might never access in-person, because they are uncomfortable in their body right now or don't have access to transport for the purpose because of problems at home."

3.2.2. Multi-level Leadership

The idea that because a country had a lack of government leadership on transgender youth research and work, it needed to be limited, could be overcome according to some informants through multi-level leadership efforts (in 34 comments). This included a combination of "borrowing" leadership from high-end legislation by the UN and policy stimulation efforts by UNESCO, WHO and the EU for example to override a local lack through either quoting these leaders or hosting them; looking "across" at national non-government bodies for leadership; and encouraging or engaging in new ground-up community-led efforts at research and practice stimulation. For example, in Mexico and India incredible work for transgender youth had been achieved despite the existence of a climate of transphobia and (at times) punitive legislation for homosexuality. Ileana Jimenez, a New York teacher, described how she had gone to these contexts and been blown away by how leaders had emerged at multiple levels in these contexts—including in student groups, parent groups, and NGOs. In conducting qualitative pedagogical investigations she met with the head of an LGBT NGO called CREA and a key lawyer fighting against 377, and later the kids at the Tagore International School in Delhi who were also leading the nation in activism for transgender rights. "Tagore is a private K-12 school with over 2000 students which featured the first 'campaign' named Breaking Barriers—what an American terms a student-run Gay Straight Alliance", Ileana explained. "It was amazingly advanced compared to an American GSA—firstly they had over 50 student members; a number unheard in the US. Further they had achieved so much in a context that was more punitive." Specifically, the students had been trained for 60 hours over three weeks by CREA on LGBTQI activism, and then trained their teachers and school staff on what they felt they needed their school to do. They had encouraged the librarians to import LGBTQI books into from overseas and locally, encouraged teaching staff to weave LGBTQI themes into the curricula and display bulletin boards on LGBTQI history in prominent spaces, and won the administration's support to march as a school group in Delhi Pride marches and engage in newspapers and television advocacy. The school's media clippings were displayed in the foyer "so it was the first thing you would see upon entering the school", Ileana noted. "This campaign had a real liberationist, student-run, critical, in-your-face intensity that you don't see students doing in the US, where kids call their clubs diversity clubs or something safe and try not to offend the religious

people . . . it was at the fore of the school's identity." Ileana was struck by how leaders emerged from the ground-up in both Mexico and India and kids researched their own needs amongst their communities through action-research approaches, because "they had to, just to feel safe." She felt that a complacency existed in the USA, where safety was a given and leadership was top-down, which prevented the creativity of multi-level leadership in research generation and activism.

3.2.3. Alliance-Building

Twenty-seven informants across all context types talked about the important of alliance-building. Carol-Ann, Director of Advocacy at Belongto said her organization had always engaged with the Irish education sector "gently, with praise and without critique" using a Safe and Supportive Schools focus to build relationships and facilitate work. Independent evaluations of this work particularly had cast the organisation as approachable, friendly and easy to work with. John Duffy, who worked on Belongto's LGBT Asylum Seeker program, went further in saying that researchers and support workers for transgender youth should partner with schools and education departments, government or non-government bodies, health and mental health providers, local community or cultural groups. "There is no use parachuting in to a rural county of Ireland, or to a foreign country, without researching first what is there, who is there, if they need what you have" he reflected. "It is not fruitful to compete with local providers for anyone, you must work together to be successful and carefully negotiate (where relevant) issues of gatekeeping of access to LGBT youth" whether for a study or for resource provision. Similarly in Viet Nam an informant explained, "alliances needed to be formed between the local UNESCO representatives, the Ministry of Education and Teaching, LGBT organisations, school administrators, teachers and researchers in order to allow surveys, interviews and focus group research about transgender students." Dr. Joe Kosciw of USA's GLSEN used the opportunity of global networking provided by an Argentinian education conference and GLSEN's investment of money into bringing foreign researchers to the event to network with Oren Pizmony-Levy from Israel, and create alliances with journal publishers and academics from around the world for better publishing opportunities. These efforts resulted in a special issue of *LGBT Health* bringing forth "a variety of voices" in transgender and other minority youth research.

3.2.4. Representation

The need for transgender youth representation in management of research and support resources was emphasised by 25 informants, again particularly in the South. Lisa, an Irish Youth Worker from Belongto, said critical social justice education models sat behind their work with transgender youth, and youth empowerment was so embedded in its structures that she was even interviewed and hired by young people alongside the managers of the organisation. She reflected, "They arrange the external speakers, skills training, internal sessions, peer evaluations and so on. My role is really just to support peer educators to achieve the young peoples' goals." This included their goal to have a Russian LGBT activist guest speaker and hear about how the Russian youth were faring. "For the transgender group we have the least resources and experience so we are spending more time doing trust exercises and team-building than activism (...) it is about working out how they can feel safe and what they feel they need." Some Northern countries had in place (such as Sweden since 1950) clear-cut NGO structures allowing community representation which stimulated the prioritization of funding for transgender themes from the community itself over time. Frederik Nilsson, Ombudsman and Head of Administration for Sweden's RFSL (LGBT NGO), commented that each of the 7000 LGBT community members of their organisation "can text or contact us at any time to voice their views on what we are or should be doing or text us during a congress if they can't be there," and the organization included transgender people from 2001 based on its members' calls, and had advocated for gender neutral marriage gained in 2009 and the abandonment of sterilization processes as a transition requirement for transgender people in 2013. The organization believed strongly in surveying members' views in "a kind of social democratic and responsive rule and it very much impacts not only what we

do, but how—we always use consultative methods and it keeps us updated and connected to the peoples' realities." He linked these methods to a long history of socialist government in Sweden, and "networked structures with connectivity going 'up' and 'down' from people to leaders and leaders to people . . . so in a way people are the leaders." As transgender youth had become more represented, their research and service needs were better met.

3.2.5. Visibility of Citizenship and Family Identities

In order to combat the National and Family Protectionist Discourses in the media used against those working with transgender youth, some informants (21) discussed the need to encourage visibility of transgender youth as citizens and family members. A Chinese informant discussed how the organization Abai facilitated mothers of transgender kids to talk to schools and universities, because "filial duty is respected and mother's love is relatable to the Chinese." A research report from the organization also mentioned China's national history of acceptance of diversity. There were complexities to relying on transgender youth themselves to be the faces of family and citizenship campaigns however. Gillian, Direct Services Manager, Belongto Ireland, commented "I always advise our transgender students to be careful about considering any media opportunities available to them early in their transition." She said transgender youth in her programs initially wanted to do all available media opportunities and were of a social media generation that exalted representation, but that although it aided research and work for transgender youth, later some kids wanted to erase the memory of their transition period post-transition. "It is a complexity particular to transgender people, that being out can be both useful and damaging for them in terms of their personal experiences of gender dysphoria (later on in life)" she explained. Other less risky visibility options that key informants used had included for example animated representations of transgender kids within family contexts, and in Japan, anime artists had rendered some black and white artworks that were starting to be used in a research report (and did not rely on "outing" a young person).

3.2.6. Legal, Financial and Capacity-Building Aid

Twenty informants discussed the need for legal, financial and capacity-building aid. Sometimes pressure on governments could be useful around investigation into crimes, but more often Southern participants preferred very specifically directed financial support for local existing grass roots organisations to help with their own research or legal aid as a preferred transnational input from the North. The education worker from Uganda discussed how "Ugandan activists had legal support, and sued an American religious extremist for his malicious international interference in our LGBT rights issues; legal support must be a priority where laws are prohibitive." A non-government organization (NGO) worker from Pakistan commented: "Financial or legal aid for working within the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province to ensure crimes against transgender people and students are taken more seriously would be more useful", she explained, "Than making the leaders angry or resentful because of aid withdrawal from outside." Several key informants had commented that certain countries, including for example Germany, had been less involved in providing legal and financial aid transnationally around transgender rights issues in education for countries so wealthy, large, and lauded for their achievements. This reticence was put down to both a lack of awareness that their financial aid on transgender youth research and work could be needed for some countries, or for Germany, their loss of confidence in their own ability to deliver the very limited international interference that transnational advocacy can involve and sense it may not be welcome (after their roles in world wars).

Another related area for investment was capacity building. A South African NGO worker reflected that Northern governments and global bodies could help by putting "money into organisations like The Coalition of African Lesbians, Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action, Nigeria's Bisi Alimi Foundation or many others' rather than investing in outreach efforts by Northern LGBT agencies." She explained, "The North must resist feeling that it 'leads' the way completely . . . can it not be content to lead by funding our own capacity-building? We do not need to be saved from ourselves! We know what is

best here." She believed funds directed into the right Southern organisations that had existed for a long time could enable South-South capacity-building. Michael Nanci-Barron, Founding Director of *Belongto Ireland*, explained that as a Southern organization their capacity building efforts around transgender work overseas were perhaps more appealing than work from Northern nations "(...) for a few reasons: we are already doing this work, we are a postcolonial country which makes the dynamic less threatening, and we have EU and OSCE links." He explained this was very useful in Eastern Europe, "although it takes some explaining for example for African nations initially unaware of it, that we are not a colonising force but were once colonised." The Irish Government had been really supportive of diplomacy in a non-punitive manner, and their Embassies elsewhere had hosted LGBT activists and academics for capacity-building events in Lithuania and Baltic nations. "We have engaged in the UPEACE event at Costa Rica, GALA 2010 Event for 3 weeks in Johannesburg South Africa, Rio Convening 2011, 2012 US State Dept. LGBT Activist International Visiting Leadership Program event at the White House and ongoing work", Michael explained. "Our UNESCO consultation work has (...) given us many relationships with Eastern European/Baltic LGBT activist groups who have seen this global work as an endorsement that we can be partnered with reliably." Sweden's RFSL took a similarly consultative approach, and since 2013 had run a "Rainbow Leader" international activism training program. The three week course trained people from 15 countries at a time and had half-yearly follow-ups in LGBT rights organizing and advocacy. RFSL's Frederik said "We train people from Southern countries like Russia, Indonesia and Uganda . . . The aim is to make international activism sustainable and locally-driven rather than to go into places like Uganda and tell them what they need, then leave and it all returns to how it was." A Polish academic endorsed existing capacity-building efforts in Warsaw including a program of "study of sexuality and gender at a local university which the EU, WHO, UNESCO or Northern countries in our region looking to invest in something might consider providing scholarships for." The course taught students relevant theories for research into transgender youth and even involved a community contacts-building study visit to *Trans-Fuzja*, a Polish NGO supporting transgender people "in legal, social, economic and human rights matters."

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The data showed some barriers in global research and work on transgender students were shared across Northern and Southern contexts. However safety concerns, cultural and language complexities, and financial and collaboration issues particularly hindered work in the South (especially where languages other than English were common). Both Northern and Southern participants cast virtual work, multi-level leadership models, alliance-building, representation and visibility strategies in resolving these problems. Nevertheless legal, financial and capacity-building aid were more important to those in the South who lacked resourcing for otherwise innovative work. The political and colonial orders of the world impacted research and work on transgender youth in restrictive ways at times. This particularly occurred in relation to the drive for some "Norths" to be seen as leaders in the field. There was resistance from the South to the imposition of external Northern or North-supported leaders in anti-transphobia work—particularly due to the way external Northern countries (through religious influences from the USA or English legislation) had sometimes actively contributed to the history of transphobic discourses in Southern contexts. Greater awareness of these complexities could enable more consultative, culturally-specific and ground-up alliance building and community representation in international collaboration that focusses more squarely on supporting rather than leading good work. *Belongto Ireland's* youth empowerment strategies, RFSL's democratic votes and so on all provided different examples of how transgender youth might become more actively engaged in generating research and support.

The data supported the idea that there is a somewhat globalized critical construction of "transgender youth" in the spirit of Altman, Warner and Drucker's writings on cosmopolitan discourses in work on transgender youth and transphobia in schools around the world—particularly in the North where the figure of the bullied transgender student is more widely accepted. However,

the work of UNESCO and a range of researchers and NGOs also reflected Binnie's emphasis on the cultural specificities of (transgender-related) identities including fafafine, ladyboy, "students who are different in their gender" and many other conceptualisations operated in Southern contexts particularly. South-South cooperation could sometimes be more useful in developing locally effective responses. The increasing globalization of Family Protectionist and National Protectionist Discourses, particularly around election periods or times of political turmoil or expansionism of either nation states or conservative global organisations (including the Catholic church, C-Fam and others), had to be combatted in complex ways and sometimes Southern contexts offered more aggressive or creative strategies (such as in the Tagore school campaign in India). Aibai China's use of family-based and historic constructions of the acceptance of diversity was another useful example. Future research could consider more directly the value of different technologies in enabling work for transgender youth around the world, and could test models for matching Northern financial and capacity aid to resourcing and helping to expand pre-existing Southern work supporting transgender youth.

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