

# Transgender and gender non-binary (TGNB) young people's experiences in schools: a social ecological analysis of the literature

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## Abstract

*This literature review investigates transgender and gender non-binary (TGNB) children in schools: what are their experiences; why are the plethora of TGNB ‘toolkits’, policies and legislation not operationalised to alleviate their systemic neglect; what are their experiences in Catholic schools (this review was facilitated by two catholic institutions); and is Bronfenbrenner’s ecological framework useful in exploring their possible systemic oppression? This framework is used to structure and facilitate analysis of the salient issues contained in the literature. Results demonstrate that physical, verbal and cyber bullying is an issue which affects their mental health and educational attainment. Schools invariably adopt a reactive approach to their emergence which puts pioneer children and families under unreasonable pressure. Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education statutory guidance omits TGNB children leaving teachers reluctant engage with the issues. In Catholic schools there is a paucity of research into TGNB issues. Further empirical research is required to investigate the range of issues revealed.*

## Keywords

Transgender, Gender Non-binary, Schools, Catholic, Education.

## Personal motivation for this review

### Systemic racism in British schools

Towards the end of July 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic an article appeared in the Guardian Newspaper with the headline: ‘There’s a hidden epidemic of racism in UK schools – but it’s finally coming to light’ (Chakraborty, 2020). I found this article thought provoking which led me to think about what might be happening to TGNB young people in our schools. I felt there might be parallels in this story with my life experience of transphobia as a transgender woman and that of many of my non-white friends.

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The narrative of the story begins with:

Abdul Mabud Chowdhury, the hospital doctor who even while sick with coronavirus wrote an open letter to Boris Johnson [UK prime minister] pleading for more masks and gowns for NHS colleagues. When he died three weeks later, 18-year-old Intisar was thrust into the headlines (Chakraborty, 2020).

Intisar reacted to his father Abdul's tragic death and the coincident killing of George Floyd in the US by deciding to ask, via social media, young BAME people about their experiences of racism in schools. He and a friend gathered the results and:

Assembled [them] into a dossier and reported exclusively by the Guardian, they comprise a horrific indicator of the abuse and even assaults dished out to black and Asian children by their peers and sometimes teachers in English schools (Chakraborty, 2020).

According to journalist Aditya Chakraborty, the article's author, these experiences chimed with an ITV poll<sup>1</sup> published the previous week which showed that '62% of black Britons agreed that the education system had a culture of racism'. These articles illustrate the systemic nature of racism in contemporary US and UK society. It is alarming that this is still the case in the UK some 30 years post the MacPherson Inquiry, into the death of black teenager Stephen Lawrence which revealed that London's Metropolitan Police was institutionally racist. Intisar and his friend's social media survey anecdotally attests to the racism present in our schools, is this a reflection of the current structural racism in UK state institutions and in schools? The Timpson Review of school exclusions (Timpson, 2019) suggest that this is the situation. Therefore, I wonder if there also a systemic oppression of TGNB young people in our schools?

#### A biographical narrative of a trans man

To deepen my thoughts on this I recall that in 2008 I interviewed (Jenkins, 2012) Steven a 34-year old transsexual man, he told me of the intense feelings he experienced as a child. He had a close twin sister and described how he first became aware that his body was undesirably developing in the same way as hers. Steven had been assigned female at birth and he wanted his body to develop following the trajectory of a cis (refers to anyone who does not identify as TGNB) boy, not a girl. He felt that he was misunderstood as a child and teenager:

My sister and I have been very close and as we kind of grew up together. [...] I saw her body changing and it never occurred to me that mine was doing the same and somehow, I managed to deny my own body right the way through my teens. I had problems because I was cutting myself. I started self-harming when I was 8 and I couldn't tell you why at the time. [...] At that time I was always able to do my own thing, play football with the boys, hang out with the lads, whereas when I moved from the village to the town we had an all girl's school and the school uniform arrived and we had all that kind of very specific [...] Suddenly the boys in the school were able to play

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ncpolitics.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2020/07/itv-has-britain-changed-tabs-ethnic-minority.pdf>

football with each other and the girls were not and I was very aware at that point that there was something wrong [...] I was tremendously lonely, I really was. I tried a very feeble attempt to kill myself when I was 16. I ended up in a psychiatrist's room for an afternoon and then being dragged along each week for a month or so [...] I mean I wasn't in any position to talk about it and I am sure that they weren't, they probably would have thought that it was more to do with being gay more than trans [um...] because it was quite clear that I was masculine (Jenkins, 2012:111-2).

Steven did not understand his feelings at 8 years of age, (it would appear neither did anyone else around him). Nevertheless, he was able to recall that he liked boys' preoccupations. At first, his experience of children's play was non-gendered but after moving to a new school in an urban setting, it became gender segregated. Gendered play separation and the usual body development caused Steven to become distressed. He began a long period, of more than eight years, of self-harm culminating with an attempt to end his life at puberty - he did not want a cis young woman's embodiment since it violated his inner sense of self.

Steven's body was, in Western culture, socially understood to be female but he felt that he was male and expressed this through his masculine play and behaviour. He transgressed the learned norms of institutional heterosexuality that a female body should correspond to feminine behaviour (Ingraham, 2005). In this way, Steven stepped outside the dominant ideological hegemony of heterosexuality. He refused the everyday understanding identified by Shapiro (2010) and the Vatican (Giuseppe, 2019 [51]) that 'gender is a direct product of biology and carries with it natural and eternal differences between men and women' (Shapiro, 2010:16). Steven's perceived strange behaviour resulted in him being deemed to have a psychiatric problem because he did not conform to the ideological structure of heterosexuality; an association also identified by Denny (2004). The shame induced by his conflicting desires caused him to suppress his anxieties and he was silenced. Steven explained, elsewhere in his interview, how he released his emotions whilst in the school sixth form through, 'free flowing musical compositions'.

The rigid enforcement by the school of adult gender patterns had devastating consequences because schools are places where conventional gender experiences are constructed and other 'gendered experiences are silenced' (DePalma and Atkinson, 2008:xii). Whittle and Turner (2007) confirm transgender children's silence and the bullying they experience in schools. These researchers posit that schools that rigidly enforce the dichotomous gender boundaries may be traumatic and stressful places for young TGNB people. Furthermore, they report that these adverse experiences may inculcate academic underachievement with possible serious consequences in later adult life. Steven did not appear to have been bullied but he internalised his distress which led to self-harm and a suicide attempt.

Steven's narrative raises several issues: self harm (including taking one's own life), systemic institutional heterosexuality, silencing, dichotomous gender boundaries and academic underachievement all of which will be explored as the arguments develop in this review. I am curious and motivated, coming from my standpoint as a transgender academic, to explore my hunch as to whether Intisar's exposure of systemic racism in schools and Steven's early life experience in the late 1970s and

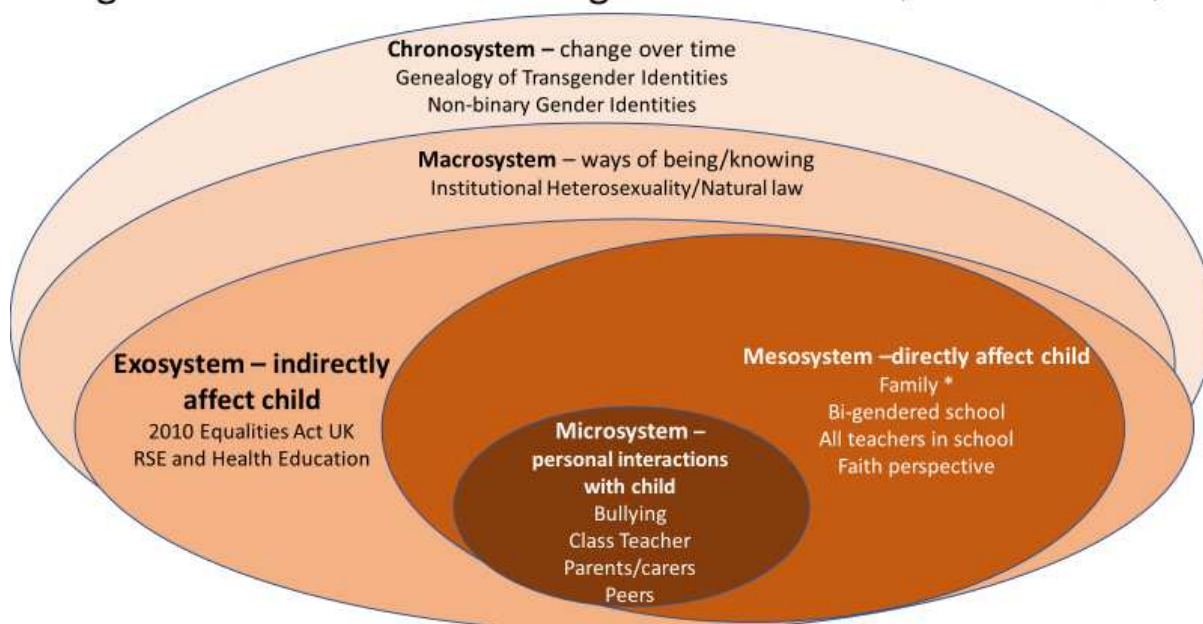
1980s reflect TGNB young people's contemporary experiences in schools and whether they are systemic.

## Methodology

An ecological framework for TGNB children's experiences in schools

As a methodological means of exploring TGNB young people's experiences I draw on Wright-Maley et al (2016) who argue that Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1993) ecological framework helps educators and school administrators to think about the larger system of TGNB oppression within all schools - whether faith based or secular. I illustrate the framework in figure 1 which is developed from Wright-Maley et al's writing. I chose to use this because it is a novel tool to structure the salient issues contained in the literature - a critical reading contextualises these issues within the framework. Additionally, using NVIVO, qualitative data analysis software, the themes, concepts and sentiments are revealed to highlight oppression of TGNB young people.

Fig 1 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Framework (Bronfenbrenner 1979,1993)



Furthermore, whilst using this framework in my analysis, it is useful to improve it using ideas drawn from the field of medicine employed by Choo (2019) to examine the injustice due to race, gender and their intersectionality in health organisations which prevents the provision of 'high-quality health care to all people' (Choo, 2019:454). Choo is addressing the provision of healthcare to marginalised groups which is consonant to the situation for the provision of high-quality education for TGNB young people in our schools, the contextual aim of this review. I use insights from Choo during this analysis of the literature.

Moreover, the number of people in the UK who identify as having a gender identity different to birth assigned sex/gender is not known (Office, 2018). Whatever, their prevalence TGNB children are present in UK schools and deserve the best possible educational experience.

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## Research questions:

An initial critical reading of the literature and its analysis suggests the following research questions:

1. What is the experience of TGNB young people in schools?
2. Why are the plethora of TGNB 'toolkits', policies and legislation not operationalised to alleviate the systemic neglect of TGNB young people in our schools?
3. What are the experiences of TGNB young people in Catholic schools and how best are they revealed?
4. Is Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework useful in exploring the possible systematic oppression of TGNB young people in our schools?

It's important to note that there is very little work on or about Catholic schools (or Catholic Education generally) 'by and large the educational research establishment has more or less ignored Catholic schooling as a site of critical scholarship' (Burke, 2018:VI). The implication for this research is that any investigation into TGNB young people's experiences should be considered generically in both state and faith schools and across Western countries. As Burke points out, one of the few studies in Catholic schools by Callaghan (2018) should be 'read widely not only by Catholic educators, but by educators committed to supporting the LGBTQ community in any school' (Burke, 2018:vii). Unfortunately, on close reading of Callaghan's book it is mainly a study of LGB people working in Catholic schools in Canada with a minimal mention of TGNB people – T and Q are often the poor and ignored relatives of LGB people.

## Catholic Schools and TGNB young people

To succinctly outline Catholic teaching in schools I to refer at length to my summary of the critical analysis (Jenkins, 2019) of the Catholic church's most recent document on education, 'Male and female He created them: towards a path of dialogue on the question of gender theory in education' (Giuseppe, 2019). My aim in that analysis was to inspire and encourage the church to reflect on its position concerning these matters in the light of scientific and sociological understandings – my critique responded to the invitation in the document for dialogue. The document reveals that the church essentially describes the bio-social essentialist framework of institutional heterosexuality with its dichotomies of sex, gender, and sexuality as natural law. The church regards it as an essential basis of Christian theology and not open to questioning. Marriage is a component of this structure and seen by the church as a heterosexual relationship. Retaining the solidity of natural law seems to be more important than fostering other forms of human interactions and values. In holding this position, the church excludes and marginalises people of good faith who are in other committed intimate relationships, especially those of different gender identities. I ask whether the church wants to continue this exclusionary heteronormative privileging by a structure which bio-social research has shown to be inadequate (Jenkins, 2019)?

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Furthermore, the document shows that the church extends this naturalistic framework to its understanding of the family which consists of a married mother and father with children. Empirical research shows that this is unsatisfactory for the study and understanding of contemporary families. The family is historically of European and American origin and is unstable. Families are now seen as being increasingly fuzzy at their boundaries whose structure is less relevant than what families do. However, the cultural imaginary of the ideal romantic heterosexual couple is powerfully retained. Marriage persists as a 'guiding cultural ideal' for much of the Western population drawing attention to the resilience of patriarchal beliefs and practices. The church seems to hold this imagined reality, naming it The Christian Family, arguing that educational institutions should teach this in line with a milieu that fully accepts parental rights concordant with this view. However, in contemporary Western societies parental rights and responsibilities concerning children are a negotiation scrutinised by agencies of the state - all the actors are situated in the ecology of the world-wide web (Chambers, 2012). It is further argued, without evidence, that the naturalistic family is the arrangement which is the best suited to challenge post-modern anthropologies characterized by fragmentation and secularity. Most studies of new family forms situated outside heterosexual marriage confirm that they are not less committed than the traditional family (ibid). Another perspective is characterised by the increasing importance of migration, ethnicity, identity belonging, politics, economics and disadvantage in host countries. These are issues affecting family life which concern Pope Francis. Does the church wish to continue with its teaching of the imaginary exclusionary Western family structure (Jenkins, 2019)?

Turning now to consider the education of young people. The utility of the document is for Catholics concerned with the formation of young people. This laudable aim is frustrated by convoluted language, uninformed scientific ideas and a homogeneous understanding of society which is not encouraging of effective pedagogical partnerships. Furthermore, the plethora of online information overload impinging on young people fails to be redressed. The prime purpose of the document, to attend to gender theory, is not realised since scientific understanding of the relationship between sex and gender is not at present fully understood. It might be argued that lack of church comprehension extends beyond educational concern to include influencing state legislators. Should the church continue with its gender ideological dogmatism?

## Microsystems (the level of personal interactions between the child and others)

### Bullying

Davy and Cordoba (2019) show that some parents suggested that the school where their child went was a toxic environment in relation to the bullying of TGNB children.

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Gender and sexuality policing from other children elevated into severe forms of bullying. They continue to describe an exceptional case quoted by the parents of a transgender child in an UK school where: physical, trans and homophobic bullying, and an attempt to end life were all experienced by their child. Wright-Maley et al further suggest that in their Canadian research that 'school climates for LGBTQ youth in general, and transgender individuals in particular ... are among the most formidable and hostile climates for transgender individuals' (2016:189) leading many such young people to stay away from schools. Research in Northern Ireland and elsewhere suggests that school climates where antibullying policies are weakly enforced condone homophobic and transphobic harassment of TGNB young people (McBride and Schubotz, 2017).

Furthermore, TGNB young people are more likely to experience homophobic name calling than cis young people, using transphobic names were less common, however, TGNB young people were occasionally abused in this way by teachers (McBride and Schubotz, 2017). TGNB young people are also more likely to experience both homophobic and transphobic abuse than their cis peers and have a heightened awareness of these abuses occurring in their schools. These researchers also were conscious that some young people's TGNB identity intersected with other discriminated identities, for example, such as those associated with racial and disabled differences. It is reported in the US that TGNB young people experience microaggressions which include: intentional or unintentional misgendering, the assumption of a single "true" transgender experience and desire for accommodation, portrayal of transgender individuals as mentally ill or sexually deviant, and reinforcement of exclusionary gender binary-focused norms. (Layla and Krystel, 2017:2). Layla and Krystel continue to suggest that in addition there is an importance of paying attention to cyberbullying and physical as well as verbal aggression outside school hours. They argue that there should be an attempt by schools to monitor this bullying.

McBride and Schubotz (2017) continue to explain that both the physical and psychological violence experienced by TGNB young people are situated in a milieu that is institutionally heterosexual - this has a negative impact on their mental health (Horton, 2020). They find themselves situated in situations that are unsafe and not educative; they are at risk of isolation and suicide, a situation that may deteriorate when they move from primary to secondary school – transgender rates of suicide are greater than for the general population (Wright-Maley et al., 2016). This situation causes school absence and failure to progress to further education (Layla and Krystel, 2017); additionally, depression and substance abuse have been reported (McBride and Schubotz, 2017). School psychologists have stated that this situation puts TGNB students at greater risk of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) in adulthood (Bethesda, 2014). Nevertheless, some of these students are resilient and resourceful which mitigate against these negative outcomes. Resilience is facilitated by having a trusted adult ally and a supportive community. The students' experiences of discrimination can also be offset when some choose to engage in activism either using social media or, for example, lobbying and organising rallies/marches (Jones et al., 2015).



## Class teachers and TGNB young people

Turning now to consider the interactions between teachers and TGNB young people in a school's milieu, 'A lack of training often leaves educators unprepared to adequately meet the needs of, or act as allies for, TGNB youth ...' (McBride and Schubotz, 2017:295). Nevertheless, Layla and Krystal (2017), report that some schools are very supportive of TGNB youth. The literature reveals that the biggest problem for TGNB young people occurs when they and their issues are silenced. For example, a young person in a Northern Ireland survey reports that whilst in primary school teachers refused to call him by his chosen name and pronouns but fortunately their secondary school experience was positive (McBride and Schubotz, 2017). In an Australian survey and interview study one participant recalls that transgender and intersex people were not mentioned in sex education classes. The effect of such silences increases abuse and poor educational outcomes (Jones et al., 2015). Silencing is reported elsewhere and characterised by teachers ignoring or avoiding questions raised in the classroom. Teachers said that: 'LGBTQ issues were not "allowed" to be discussed in the classroom' (Chew et al., 2020:792).

Rose (1991) draws our attention to how some issues are silenced. He argues that there has been a shift from coercive forms of judicial like power towards a more ideological form of power with a tendency towards normalisation and regulation. Foucault (1980) discusses ideological power which relies on self-scrutiny and discipline where the self acts on itself, he referred to the technologies of the self. Furthermore, Foucault saw power as a way of knowing, not a set of facts but of the discourses associated with heteronormativity. Drawing on these two scholars, this review is concerned with the ideological hegemonic power discourses and relationships of the family, sex and gender as part of the ideological framework of heterosexuality. Consequently, when various actors in schools silence TGNB issues it facilitates the dominance of institutional heterosexuality by holding it in place.

Chew et al (2020) report that as a result of silencing TGNB students were left feeling scared or as being perceived as freaks explained by a participant reporting that teachers assumed that everyone identified as either male or female. Nevertheless, some teachers were prepared to discuss the issues outside the classroom. An Australian study suggests that because of these largely negative concerns TGNB young people who had little teacher support were more likely to leave school, hide at lunchtime, be subjected to increased bullying in real space and online (Jones et al., 2015). To counter these negative outcomes, a Southwark UK diocesan working group (private email correspondence) suggest that members of staff are especially trained in TGNB students' issues. This person could be an ally with whom they could rely on to be comfortable in discussing their feelings, such staff may also lead on CPD (staff curriculum and professional development). A contextual note from the Northern Ireland study (Neary and Cross, 2018) is relevant here, especially for primary schools. Children articulated that they were gender TGNB from the time they could communicate, this chimes with Kohlberg (1996) and Fausto-Stirling's (2012) anticipation that gender identity is fixed between 3 to 5 years of age. These children subsequently used a range of approaches to negotiate their identities such as adopting their preferred names and pronouns.

## TGNB and their Parents/Carers

Parents also responded to the emergence of TGNB children in a diversity of ways by drawing on their economic, social, cultural and symbolic resources. For example, researchers identify that parents often have the responsibility of educating teachers and schools about TGNB issues, they often procure relevant resources for the school and engage in continuing dialogue with the educators (Davy and Cordoba, 2019, Neary and Cross, 2018).

When persistent TGNB behaviour was demonstrated by a child, parents may try to stop this because of the shame of its effect on 'extended family members, neighbours [sic], clergy [Catholic], day-care providers, and others' (Wright-Maley et al., 2016:10). My research (Jenkins, 2012) shows that parents might react violently towards their children in the parents pursuit of gender conformity and this is confirmed by Wright-Maley who additionally cite expulsion from the family home. They continue to detail how this parental lack of acceptance affects TGNB young people who are 'more likely to be at risk for depressive symptoms, substance use, and suicidal ideation and attempts' (Wright-Maley et al., 2016:10). They further comment that parents should normally try to protect their children from harm both physically and online, [however, this can depend on parental beliefs and attachment to institutional heterosexuality/natural law]. Consequently, TGNB youth are more likely than cis young people to be subjected to both institutional and family rejection (Jones et al., 2015). These issues raised have a direct consequence for the delivery of good pastoral care for TGNB young people by schools and for those who belong to churches. However, care is needed in this enterprise especially when a child's TGNB identity is revealed by schools to a TGNB child's parents which might have a harmful effect on the child (Callaghan, 2018). This is a situation involving safeguarding which needs to be cautiously explored with the support of safeguarding officers.

## TGNB children and their peers

Finally, in this section on the microsystem of oppression, I turn to consider cis peers' interaction with TGNB students. When TGNB young people emerge in a school they fear rejection and abuse from these peers who might police institutional heterosexuality (Layla and Krystel, 2017, Carrera-Fernández and DePalma, 2020). Conversely, peers can often be a means of support and acceptance for TGNB young people resulting in them being less likely to experience bullying (Jones et al., 2015). All is not negative, TGNB 'children are brilliant and spectacular and ordinary—in many ways they are exactly the same as their cis classmates' (Horton, 2020:67).

## Mesosystems (the connections between environments that directly affect the child)

### Family/carers and schools

In turning now to consider the relationships between families/carers and schools I shall return, in the first instance, to silencing. An Australian young trans woman offers a

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perspective - she hid her gender identity in a Christian school because she did not want it to affect her mother's career as a teacher who taught in the same school (Jones et al., 2015). Shame is an issue I picked up in my doctoral study (Jenkins, 2012) where a cis brother working in finance hid the existence of his trans sister because of his fear for his career, this also chimes with my personal familial experience. These situations provoke anxiety where the participants feel powerless to deal with their loyalty to the ideology of family and institutional heterosexuality and to the reality of their situation involving TGNB identity. Shame is a social manifestation of these conflicts (Smart, 2007).

In my Catholic diocese I am aware of schools that have TGNB children on role - they have adopted a reactive approach to the situation. This is reported in other research where schools react after a TGNB child's parental engagement with the school (Davy and Cordoba, 2019). The insufficiency of such an approach is that there may be hidden TGNB children in a school who therefore feel they need to remain concealed (Jones et al., 2015). To support these unseen children schools should be proactive by giving families informed professional and peer support (McBride and Schubotz, 2017). However, Davy and Cordoba (ibid) report that parents learn about TGNB issues through their interactions with peer support groups. These researchers continue; emerging as TGNB in schools is a gradual process dependant on the age of the child. However, negotiations involving relevant simple practicalities such a name changes were generally easy to obtain. The issues became more problematic when these required the involvement of examination authorities or changing schools.

Helpful emotional and educational outcomes are achieved when school-family dialogues are positive. For some children difficulties arise in situations such as when a TGNB child has a birthday party and exclusionary normative bi-gendered practices come into play (Neary and Cross, 2018). However, in Davy and Cordoba's research a school had only one 'complaint from a parent about their child being "subjected" to gender diversity' (Davy and Cordoba, 2019:363) - TGNB children's friends were generally sympathetic. This demonstrates a refreshing situation but conversely, families were exacerbated by the dearth of safe environments for TGNB young people, the lack of medical support (both physical and mental) and care in the wider community (McBride and Schubotz, 2017). Nevertheless, Davy and Cordoba add that when a school was able to involve nurses and psychologists TGNB children's health outcomes were positive, yet, there were in other schools, internal opposition to the presence of TGNB young people, which they argue needed to be dealt with.

### School leaders

School leaders face a complex problem and change process in their response to the needs of TGNB students. To be effective it is essential to acknowledge that schools are embedded in a socio-political milieu of the ideology of institutional heterosexuality/natural law (Wright-Maley et al., 2016). To help leaders with this task Layla and Krystel (2017) conclude that leaders' tasks may be focused on delivering the implementation of state legislation, interpreting this in the context of their school population and engaging the community (including parents) as stake holders. Callaghan(2018:6), however, points out that 'Catholic schools are accountable to civil, not church, authorities.' Burke interprets this further that a kind of 'doctrinal disciplining

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occurs' where Catholic school leaders choose to believe 'that Catholic schools have the denominational right to interpret governmental policy on matters of sexuality through a Catholic lens'(Burke, 2018:vi). How leaders deal with these issues is important for the socio-emotional well-being and successful academic attainment of TGNB young people and their participation in mainstream life (Layla and Krystel, 2017). Furthermore, school failure to effectively and proactively engage may exacerbate the situation for all students in the school, a situation also highlighted by others (Neary and Cross, 2018, Horton, 2020). Reactive approaches may upset the parents of TGNB children through bringing unwanted attention from cis children and their parents, Horton concludes that trans inclusive adaptations are 'too often prompted by a specific pupil, a "sacrificial lamb" who sends a school into "panic," ... [and that adjustments] may not be sustained or transferred to wider classes'. (Horton, 2020:13). They further refer to such 'pioneer' children and families as being subjected to severe pressure. Proactive engagement requires ongoing dialogue with families and other support professionals grounded in the principle of equality and human dignity (McBride and Schubotz, 2017). Drawing on Choo's (2019) principles for high quality healthcare, school leaders, for the sake of TGNB young people, need to tread in the uncomfortable issues of life in 21st century schools. Failure to engage with equality and dignity will compromise a school's ability to provide high quality education for all its pupils. Resistance to these issues will lead to inequality, the lack of inclusion of TGNB young people, their harassment and failure to participate fully in educational provision. A situation which exacerbates the paucity of any educational research which facilitates the positive experiences of TGNB young people.

The issue of school leadership is vital in the absence of strong guidance on TGNB education from government and some local authorities. Consequently, direction needs to be shown by senior management, staff and governors (Horton, 2020). The UK Department for Education has issued statutory regulations covering Relationship and Sex Education, RSE, which came into effect in September 2020 (Education, 2019) this is discussed later. Nevertheless, the regulations highlight that where effective practice in RSE has occurred in schools a member of the senior leadership takes responsibility for this aspect of school life supported by a subject lead or coordinator. However, there is no specific guidance as to what is needed for TGNB young people in schools.

Leaders need to think both structurally and about the whole school curriculum (Jones et al., 2015). More specifically, Layla and Krystel (2017) suggest that senior leaders guide teachers concerning their daily interactions with TGNB young people through, in the first instance, what to do in simple issues such as appropriate names and pronouns. In giving this direction they need to respect the young people's wishes and their demographic diversity (Jones et al., 2015). Concern needs to be shared with other staff so that all teachers have ownership and responsibility.

Drawing on Choo (2019) and good healthcare practice, school leaders and teachers should set robust monitoring and accountability in place with tangible actions required to improve TGNB young people's experiences. Any failure should be regarded as an opportunity to learn and improve. If TGNB children remain hidden in a school attention needs to be focused on subtle cultural issues prevalent in the school whilst always being alert to transphobic violence. Following Choo, I suggest that safe spaces in

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schools are created. These spaces are characterised by open discussion sessions aimed at sharing TGNB young people's perspectives making the opportunity for them to receive support – such spaces are like school clubs with a mix of TGNB children and their supportive peers facilitated by sympathetic teachers.

A problematic issue is that of toilets where TGNB young people need to feel safe in the school, however, this poses a difficulty of balancing the needs of TGNB and the rest of the school population. Layla and Krystel (2017) suggest that the focus for school leaders involves 'building trust through well-crafted policy, a supportive climate, and confident navigation of the legal implications of supporting transgender students' (ibid:2). Parents will also have a stake in this highly politicised and cultural issue, a manifestation of the culture war surrounding TGNB issues. Culturally divided people rely on their ideological position which is highly personal and related to their identity. Some parents will engage with their emotions not using critical reasoning and rage ensues. These parents cannot rise to the poisoned bait offered by these wars and are caught in a paradoxical trap. Navigating this terrain will cause leaders discomfort but will create an opportunity for them to grow as leaders and people (Layla and Krystel, 2017). Some supportive School leaders might, for example, act as educators of parents concerning TGNB issues. Davy and Cordoba (2019) found that, in the UK that some schools and their associated support professionals gave sufficient help whilst others 'were occasionally oppositional to their children's gender expressions ...' (Davy and Cordoba, 2019:361), these issues, they argue, needed attention. Supportive professionals are ideally placed to take on a pedagogic role for parents.

However, McBride and Schubotz (2017) found that because of high levels of discrimination in Northern Ireland against TGNB young people that there is a need to train school support professionals with the knowledge and skills to assist these young people become resilient. Teaching specialists should focus on enabling TGNB youth to connect with school and equip them for life in a heteronormative world, furthermore, schoolteachers need to be skilled with CPD to enable this. These professionals who work with TGNB children need to ground their approach in: 'the principles of acceptance, support, freedom of identity expression, validation and recognition' (McBride and Schubotz, 2017:303). Nevertheless, Neary and Cross (2018) report that some educators felt that TGNB young people had a positive impact on their schools by enhancing the curriculum in the areas of sexuality and gender.

### Bi-gendered school systems

Researchers found that highly bi-gendered (heteronormative) school systems and practices, often more prevalent in faith schools, were problematic for TGNB young people. Examples include; single sex schools, sport, physical education, names and pronouns, school dances, overnight trips and teaching of curricula (Neary and Cross, 2018, McBride and Schubotz, 2017, Davy and Cordoba, 2019, Layla and Krystel, 2017). These cultures forced TGNB children to hide their identity expression, drop out of school, face sanctions and bullying. Furthermore, heteronormative practices were often found to increase as the children moved from nursery to primary and then to secondary school where bi-gendered policing by other children often escalates across these phases. Neary and Cross (ibid) found that awareness of these problems often caused teachers to reflect and change their practice. Layla and Krystel (ibid) take this

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further and suggest that some school leaders envisaged an increase of more gender-neutral spaces and practices to better accommodate TGNB young people - a few leaders were already experimenting with these changes. McBride and Schubotz (ibid) argue that curriculums that omit gender and sexual diversity limits young people's knowledge about TGNB identity formation and understanding of the biological and social factors involved in such formation. Furthermore, such lacuna can serve to discursively erase the existence of TGNB and non-heterosexual identities and impedes all pupils' awareness and understanding of their own gender and sexual identity.

## Teachers

When TGNB children are mentioned in CPD they are often situated in a negative discourse of pathologisation, delegitimisation, problematisation, medicalization, and a deficit framing (Horton, 2020, Jones et al., 2015). For example, Horton cites: Riggs and Bartholomaeus (2018) who 'provide an example of a parent of a 5 year old trans girl being asked by a school to provide a psychiatrist report and have genetic testing before the school might accept her' (Horton, 2020:3). Because of this the children are thus denied a voice to speak for themselves. Teachers are then left feeling that these students are at risk, need protection and need a therapeutic response - a situation that the teachers felt incapable of dealing with (Layla and Krystel, 2017). This predicament can be re-framed to empower the young people and give them self-advocacy - unless this happens the questioning and ignorance they experience exerts 'a daily toll, a burden that is unreasonable for young shoulders to carry' (Horton, 2020:13).

Research has found that when teachers generally avoid sensitive issues in schools it saves the teachers from being embarrassed leaving the pupils to make sense of the situation using inaccurate and discriminatory information from peers and the media. This is particularly problematic for TGNB young people when their gender identities emerge in the early years of schooling, consequently they are put at greater risk of bullying and having to face a climate of intolerance. It needs to be said that schools have the ability to rectify their plight using appropriate CPD to improve school climate and safety (Wright-Maley et al., 2016, Gowen and Wings-Yanez, 2014). Furthermore, Horton draws attention to the US statistic that in a survey of 5000 TGNB adolescents only 16% 'reported that they always feel safe at school' (Horton, 2020:4). Horton continues to document how TGNB young people situated in a hostile school environment don't thrive, are prone to absenteeism and suffer poor psychological well-being. Nevertheless, in the UK all schools are subject to the 2010 Equalities Act (UK, 2010) and should have policies in place to avoid discriminatory infringement. When the Act is enforced TGNB pupils will become more self-confident, secure and validated resulting in equality of opportunity with their peers. However, school guidance documents seem not to address the effect of a climate of institutional heterosexuality pervading schools which manifests as micro-aggression directed at TGNB young people causing them to be stressed and feeling unsafe. Furthermore, 'school guidance documents vary in how effectively they centre trans children's rights, and in how much they listen to trans children's voices, experience, concerns, and priorities' (Horton, 2020:8).



Wright-Maley et al's (2016) findings show that there is 'dissonance between the personal and professional beliefs of new Catholic teachers' (2016:188). They point out that teachers have a responsibility to educate children about the pluralistic society in which they exist. However, often early years teachers defer this until the children are older, assuming that they are too young. They may also adopt a more generic position as adequate maintaining that, for example, 'everyone is equal, we're all the same in God's eyes, etc' (2016:189), furthermore, this omission might be a result of teachers' unwillingness to engage with the issues of TGNB children. As discussed previously, this silencing reinforces heteronormativity. Where such an environment exists in a school a willing teacher might fear drawing attention to these pupils. Some schools are not supportive or may even prohibit teachers from revealing their own non-heteronormative identities which might further inhibit the opportunity for such teachers to support TGNB children. Some teachers cite that their principle concern occurs when school authorities instruct teachers about what can or cannot be taught. Two of the four teachers interviewed by Wright-Maley et al suggested that lack of perceived family diversity amongst their constituents inhibited them - only one teacher said that nothing would stop them. However, in a UK context, evidence suggests that fears of antagonisms are generally groundless (Davy and Cordoba, 2019) but anxiety still exists (Layla and Krystel, 2017). Returning to a North American context, a discouraging factor for Catholic teachers might include the fear of contravening church doctrine and the lack of support from peers and headteachers. Despite all these discouraging influences, some participants cite the reality of family diversity represented in their classrooms as a reason for teaching about non-traditional families relying on Catholic social teaching (PEACE, 2004) concerning 'compassion, respect, and human dignity' (Wright-Maley et al., 2016:195).

### Classroom

Education about TGNB issues can occur in three school spaces; token acknowledgement in the classroom, discussion outside the classroom and full inclusiveness, however, the students themselves call for more inclusiveness (Gowen and Wings-Yanez, 2014). The Catholic Southwark schools project (private correspondence) in the UK suggests that schools work collaboratively on LGBT issues sharing resources. They further acknowledge that schools are frequently approached by outside organisations offering training but most of these have no religious foundation - Catholic schools need to be aware that overall responsibility lies with the diocesan bishop. I found in my work that two key UK organisations Gender Intelligence and Stonewall are secular and they did not use any faith-based material in 2017. Wright-Maley et al (2016) list further resources in a Canadian Catholic context. Some of these materials focus on challenging the exclusivity of binary gender normativity. These researchers in drawing attention to these classroom materials wish to support teachers in breaking the silencing of TGNB issues in school curricula. Bayly's book, aimed to support teachers, has a range of both didactic and experiential strategies for use in classrooms; role-play and practice scenarios, formal presentations, videos, and question and comments sessions. Bayly further suggests that each session begins with a LGBT-focused prayer and/or reflection (Bayly, 2012:xii). This material, although Catholic is weak on TGNB issues but I feel may be creatively adapted. However,

Horton (2020) addresses this need in the UK by presenting a comprehensive list of secular TGNB guidance material that can be used in the classroom.

### Faith perspectives on teaching about TGNB issues

Wright-Maley et al., (2016) quote from Pope Francis' encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium*, 'to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the "peripheries" in need of the light of the Gospel' (Francis, 2013:24) a place where Christ is to be found. They interpret this to mean to occupy these liminal spaces with bravery and courage. In schools they focus on first grade teaching relating to the reality of diversity found amongst the children's families. What is required, drawing on Bayly (2012) is a bringing together of the church's social teaching and its teaching in the Vatican document on education (Giuseppe, 2019) with the needs of TGNB young people and their families, which will not be an easy task. The aim should be to respond to questions that young people grapple with as they deal with sex/gender issues, help with this will be found in my critique of the Vatican document (Jenkins, 2019).

In the Canadian Catholic school research, Wright-Maley et al (2016) report from their survey that there is much work to be done in Catholic schools and schools generally to support TGNB young people – they do point out that their inquiry is not generalisable but is indicative, stating that the status quo is challenging for these young people. There are tensions for the Catholic school system between older people's perceptions of gender and younger generations tolerance of gender variance and inclusion, a problem not helped by volatile statements from some individual leaders. This mixed messaging is problematic for the full inclusion of TGNB students in schools. They further argue that if TGNB identities are not addressed children's ideas might be erroneous and stop them 'learning to acknowledge the divinity within everyone, which is central to Christianity and is perhaps best expressed in the gospel line to "love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than this" (Mark 12:31)' (Wright-Maley et al., 2016:199) an idea which resonates with Canadian diversity. Further, making the point that volatile statements not only contravenes Pope Francis' exhortation but also the Gospel message. To close the gap between social pluralism and Catholic belief in schools will be difficult and take time but a task that should be grasped.

I shall continue to draw upon this Canadian research as it is one of the few and significant pieces of research in Catholic education. Turning now to consider the effect of the issues described by Wright-Maley et al. on Catholic teachers who might themselves be LGBTQ (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or Queer). These teachers must balance their private lives against openly supporting diversity. They are forced to live inauthentically in fear or to act with primacy of conscience, *Gaudium et Spes* (Paul, 1962-5) which states that individuals should be free to follow their conscience in the pursuit of social justice. Changes need to be made if 'Catholic schools are to achieve their vision of inclusion with an emphasis on the primacy of human life, human dignity and solidarity' (Wright-Maley et al., 2016:198). Furthermore, these authors address the effect of a gender inclusive approach to teaching about TGNB students which helps challenge heteronormativity and enables these children to express themselves more fully. It also helps to reveal safe adults in schools to which these children might seek support and talk with – a situation

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conducive to reducing the tragic statistics on TGNB suicide. An inclusive approach addresses the 'core Catholic values of inclusion, the sanctity of human life and human dignity, authenticity, solidarity and education that attends to the whole person' (Wright-Maley et al., 2016:199). Finally, an additional issue noted by Neary and Cross' (2018) research is the gendered nature of First Holy Communion which may cause significant distress for TGNB young people and their families, a reviewer of this document told me in private correspondence that a church tried to introduce non-gender specific dress for First Holy Communion in the form of albs but were almost torn apart by the parents of the cis girls.

Closing this section on mesosystemic oppression, it is of note that institutional heterosexuality and natural law (in Catholic teaching) permeates educational practices and policies. In faith schools where conservative Christian values are predominant the presence of TGNB young people is treated negatively which denies their self-development and expression (McBride and Schubotz, 2017). Furthermore, TGNB young people have a higher lack of involvement with the church compared to their cis counterparts. The researchers also found that although there should be antibullying policies in place TGNB young people often failed to report TGNB and homophobic bullying in religious schools – they also were silenced or disparaged which had a negative impact on their emotional health. Finally, they report that even today, in many religious schools, sex education is focused on the norms of institutional heterosexuality. For example, in England and Wales the Catholic Education Service model curricula on sex and relationships omits the mention of TGNB children in its schools referring only to the statutory requirement to address transphobic bullying. This is a strategy that Callaghan (2018) suggest closes down discussion and avoids repercussions for the church in teaching about TGNB issues. Furthermore, the obligation to abide by the Equalities Act 2010<sup>11</sup> is included, however, the protected characteristic of gender reassignment is omitted from the list of protected characteristics. An alarming situation since the English schools statutory guidance on Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education mentions that 'Catholic and other schools draw on the model curricula provided by the Catholic Education Service' (Education, 2019:46). Nevertheless, as Foucault (1978) argues this silencing or absence in fact encourages subversion by those willing to take the risk. Callaghan (2018) takes silencing further and suggests that it might be a reaction to conservative opposition.

Exosystems - areas of influence that impact the lives of children, but which influence the child only indirectly

#### The UK 2010 Equalities Act

The protected characteristics of the 2010 Equalities Act<sup>11</sup> in the UK which might apply to TGNB young people are gender reassignment, sex and sexual orientation. Guidance for schools concerning gender reassignment can be found in (Education, 2014). The applicability of the act will depend on age of child, state of transition and status as GNB. There is uncertainty due to legal status of GNB young people which

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is being contested in the domain of UK courts, consequently the issues are not fully resolved at the time of writing in 2020.

### Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education

Turning now to focus on teaching about TGNB issues in English schools, the most recent and relevant document is Relationships Education, RSE and Health Education (Education, 2019) statutory guidance from the Department for Education which came into effect in September 2020) (The devolved nations have their own regulations regarding education). The secretary of state for education states that:

Relationships Education compulsory in all primary schools in England and Relationships and Sex Education compulsory in all secondary schools, as well as making Health Education compulsory in all state-funded schools (2019:4).

Additionally, the guidance is within the scope of Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills - the inspection and regulatory service).

There is repeated emphasis in the document about devolving responsibility in this area to schools and headteachers. I shall develop an argument that this transference is a twin edged sword. For example, a flavour of this is given here:

Schools should ensure that all of their teaching is sensitive and age appropriate in approach and content. At the point at which schools consider it appropriate to teach their pupils about LGBT ...' (paragraph 37).

Set aside the grammatical usage of the use of the acronym LGBT (no noun) how is a school to take responsibility and decide about sensitivity and age appropriateness when these issues are complex, socio-politically difficult and contentious? Furthermore, to add to these problems:

Schools should consider what is appropriate and inappropriate in a whole-class setting, as teachers may require support and training in answering questions that are better not dealt with in front of a whole class' (paragraph 64).

This might well be a significant problem in a situation where there exists a complex mix of children of different religious affiliation, ethnicity and the range of gender identities. There is no reference to the multifaceted problems that TGNB young people will face at puberty embedded in a socio-cultural milieu where a heteronormative binary gender identity is assumed and illustrated in this statement, '... both boys and girls are prepared for the changes that adolescence brings ...' (paragraph 67). Schools are left entirely to decide what is encompassed in the statement, 'Pupils should be taught the facts and the law about sex, sexuality, sexual health and gender identity in an age-appropriate and inclusive way' (paragraph 75). What law has the author of the document in mind with respect to gender identity? Are they referring to the protected characteristics of sex or gender reassignment of the Equalities Act 2010? Are the authors aware of the unclear legal situation concerning GNB young people? The law clearly needs to catch up with recent social developments in the understanding of transgender variance. Why is the undesired development of TGNB people's bodies omitted in the reference in Key stage 3 and 4 relating to binary male

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and female anatomy and reproduction? Furthermore, intersex bodies and artificial insemination are known sex identities and reproductive technologies of which older teenagers might well have some awareness (see paragraph 106). In summary, TGNB children have emerged in schools since the mid-2010s and there appears to be no official recognition of this in school curricula.

I shall now return to my argument that devolution of RSE to schools might be a twin-edged sword. In January 2016 the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee (the committee is appointed to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Government Equalities Office and associated public bodies) published a report concerning transgender equalities recommending that transgender issues should be included as part of Personal, Social and Health Education [PSHE]. In June 2016 the government responded that transgender education was already in the curriculum, included in the phrase 'gender identity', however, Morgan and Taylor point out that this is an example of the use of a 'diversity rhetoric to refer to transgender identities, but retains the function of referring to any gender identity' (Morgan and Taylor, 2018:21). Such ambiguity creates questions as to what identity is to be taught and at what key stage. Furthermore, these researchers indicate that this diversity rhetoric is a common usage in the UK which implies, drawing on my arguments above, that there is no explicit reference to transgender issues in schools throughout the UK, the usage is mirrored in the devolved nations. Evidence suggests that any TGNB education in schools will generate a backlash, a counteraction 'must take the form of explicit and specific intent within policy' (Morgan and Taylor, 2018:22). If this does not happen any such affirmative pedagogy will expose a school to critical attack. They further argue that the consequences of this leave schools open to wrongdoing whilst the government remains innocent. However, this situation is contrary to non-statutory recommendations of the PSHE Association<sup>2</sup> which calls for transgender issues to be included and with its absence young people are denied the opportunity to learn about gender variance (McBride and Schubotz, 2017). Furthermore, schools are put in a situation of possibly not fulfilling their duty of care for TGNB young people (Horton, 2020). This deficit situation not only applies to the UK but also in the US where a survey of young people shows that very few schools have any education about LGBT issues and teachers lack guidance and training (Gowen and Wings-Yanez, 2014). However, this lack is despite the fact that educators look to the state authorities for guidance (Layla and Krystel, 2017).

I shall now explore the consequences of the official omission of TGNB issues in school curricula by referring to a case study in a UK primary school undertaken by Morgan and Taylor (2018). They begin with press reporting of when the headteacher, Emma Maltby, decided to include transgender issues in her primary school curriculum. The media first report that the children were too young to deal with these issues using an unjustified language of persuasiveness that children are not ready for 'early exposure' (Morgan and Taylor, 2018:30). This rhetoric is unfortunate as some children might be experiencing gender identity questioning at an early age (Kohlberg, 1996, Fausto-Stirling, 2012). The media reporting of the school infers that the headteacher was acting wrongly in not using her common sense that the children were too young. Morgan and Taylor discuss their analysis of Emma Maltby situation, she interpreted

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/> [accessed 19/10/2020]



gender identity to mean transgender because of her possible misunderstanding of the diversity rhetoric in the use of the word gender which satisfies the 2010 Equalities duty. They comment, 'a mistake perhaps, in so far that while this is how the guidance was supposed to be read, it was arguably also supposed to be skilfully misread' (Morgan and Taylor, 2018:31) as might be the case by any school leader. They further remark that the situation had not been resolved when they published, however, as I have discussed above this is still the case in 2020. If any blame is to be attached it is that attributed to the headteacher who misinterpreted not to the government who intended its misinterpretation - a disingenuous situation. The absence of clear guidance both from the state and from religious leaders (discussed earlier) leaves teachers in a reluctant and impotent position to teach about TGNB issues (Neary and Cross, 2018) a state of affairs that pertains in schools across the UK.

Returning to the RSE and Health Education statutory guidance and parental involvement. Schools are required to have an up-to-date policy which is available to parents and published on their website (paragraph 15). The document continues that schools should work with parents to plan and teach these subjects and their participation is spelt out in detail concerning content and when it will be taught. Furthermore, parents have a right to request the withdrawal of their child from sex education which should only be denied after discussion and in exceptional circumstances granted (paragraphs 41 and 47). Age appropriateness must be in consultation with parents and the local community and comply with provisions of the Equality Act 2010 which exacerbates difficulty. If TGNB issues are to be taught, then Emma Maltby's situation discussed above presents a cautionary note. For example, Layla and Krystel, in the US, alerts educators to 'pushback and fear from parents [which] presented a need for ongoing education aimed at parents, perhaps even more so than faculty, staff, or students' (Layla and Krystel, 2017:7). Parents need to be included early after a TGNB child emerges in schools, what transgender means needs to be explained and understood as no threat to cis children, even though parents might have difficulty hearing this.

The statutory guidance addresses religion and belief, including teaching in schools with a religious character (I am referring to paragraphs 18-21). There needs to be a positive relationship between schools and local faith communities which, I assume, might include Christian schools with a majority Muslim background, a challenging task of reconciliation in the context of sex and relationships education. Furthermore, pupils' faith background must be considered when planning teaching and even more challenging they must follow the Equalities Act 2010. I recall where religion, sexuality and gender reassignment intersect, courts have had difficulty in sorting these intersections, for example, see the court case resulting from the intersection of religion and gay sexuality (McDonald, 2019). The guidance continues:

In particular, schools with a religious character may teach the distinctive faith perspective on relationships, and balanced debate may take place about issues that are seen as contentious (paragraph 21).

In the light of the statutory guidance, if a school decides to teach about TGNB issues then, for example, the Catholic church does not have a clear policy in this area (Jenkins, 2019). Despite this, my experience in the UK suggests that some churches

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and schools have responded well and have good pastoral care for individual TGNB people/children. Families are varied and have many forms and provide a nurturing support to children including looked after children, schools should be sensitive to this situation and should not discriminate against these young people (paragraph 59). My doctoral study indicates that family members do reject transsexual people/children (Jenkins, 2012) and a more recent survey by the Guardian newspaper asking LGBTQ people about their experiences during the 2020 pandemic reported that 'many younger people said they had been unable to access the support of LGBTQ peers or allies while with their families, and those who had moved in with relatives during lockdown felt they were being pushed back into the closet (Batty, 2020). Although this is a newspaper article which requires caution it is suggestive of a correlation with a deterioration in the mental health of young TGNB people reported academically by Kneale and Becares (2020). Families are not always caregivers for TGNB young people as assumed by the UK government, an issue which correlates with research in Northern Ireland (McBride and Schubotz, 2017).

To conclude this discussion of the statutory guidance from the Department for Education I have demonstrated that it does little to help TGNB young people in our schools. However, Gowen and Wings-Yanez's (2014) survey and focus groups with LGBT young people has many suggestions how these young people feel the curriculum in schools might be improved.

Turning now to consider the backlash against teaching about TGNB issues. School leaders cannot ignore the hostile and the highly politicised nature of opposition to such teaching in North America, Australia and the UK (Layla and Krystel, 2017, Morgan and Taylor, 2018). This hostility focusses around bullying, access to bathrooms [toilets] and resistance to young people's 'exposure' to gender variance. For example, a parent's comments are reported in a UK tabloid newspaper, 'I don't want my daughter being exposed to all this nonsense. Kids need to be left alone when it comes to things like this, they just want to run around the playground not be told they need to 'think differently' about gender issues' (Morgan and Taylor, 2018:26).

This utterance demonstrates a 'common-sense' view which is not to be questioned. Furthermore, during 2019 a protest row was discussed by the BBC news (BBC, 2019) concerning the teaching of LGBT issues in a Birmingham primary school – the protests began in 2014 and were never fully resolved but had subsided by 2019 (Carrera-Fernández and DePalma, 2020). In the US Layla and Krystel's (2017) quote school leaders who relate how parents seem to be ideologically driven, based on personal opinions rather than actual facts about TGNB issues -they were not interested in objectivity. They further comment that children are more accepting of the issues than parents who are emotionally driven.

Turning to consider another dimension of criticism. Feminism has been divided on the issue of transgender since the late 1970s (Jenkins, 2012, Carrera-Fernández and DePalma, 2020), recently an acronym has emerged TERF, Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists, some feminists who hold an anti-trans perspective - especially against transgender women. This discourse does not only oppress transgender women but also young people who are trying to explore gender. The TERF Sheila Jeffreys views are described by Carrera-Fernández and DePalma, she draws attention

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to the medical use of puberty blockers for TGNB children as social engineering likened to 'early 20th century eugenics campaigns – the forced sterilization of delinquents as well as the poor, homosexuals and the Roma' (Carrera-Fernández and DePalma, 2020:753). This is a highly anti-trans statement, an example of a high profile woman expressing transphobia. Jeffrey's provocative comparison reflect Janice Raymond's long-standing ideas concerning the medical treatment of transsexual people to 'unethical experimentation on a captive population in Nazi concentration camps' (Raymond, 1979:148). Similar statements are expressed by others all of which have a negative effect on young TGNB people's mental health (Kneale and Becares, 2020).

Further anti-trans sentiment is illustrated by returning to the analysis (Morgan and Taylor, 2018) of the primary school headteacher Emma Maltby's proposal to hold a transgender day for young people at her school. This was reported 5 newspaper outlets the Daily Mail, Daily Star, Mirror, Sun and the Telegraph and a huge array of opinion pieces online. Editorials expressed similar sensational anti-trans shocked sentiment, 'Parents pull children out of Primary school in outrage at planned 'transgender day' for children as young as FOUR. (Daily Mail)' (Morgan and Taylor, 2018:23) – a further example of childhood innocence, that silences teaching to young people about TGNB issues.

To conclude this discussion of the exosystem of oppression it is of note that in many countries it is dangerous to come out as a TGNB person both young and old (Bethesda, 2014). It is safer to remain hidden. Despite this, Layla and Krystel (2017) argue that some headteachers desire to take on the responsibility of making schools safe for TGNB young people arguing that schools should be a place of acceptance and protection but as discussed above this is difficult. Furthermore, the victimisation of TGNB young people is exacerbated by 'a lack of safe environments, poor access to physical health services, inadequate resources to address mental health and a lack of continuity of caregiving by families and communities (McBride and Schubotz, 2017:295). However, drawing again on healthcare practice, backlash should be expected by organisations seeking to enhance the experiences of TGNB young people [my focus]. Schools should embrace this as a learning opportunity to uphold the highest ideals of the teaching profession (following Choo, 2019).

## Macrosystems (the beliefs, customs, culture, notions of acceptable ways of being and knowing)

### Institutional heterosexuality or natural law

In the earlier methodological section on Catholic Schools and TGNB young people I introduced the concept of institutional heterosexuality or natural law. TGNB emergence disrupts its sex, gender and sexuality normative binaries (Nagoshi and Brzuzy, 2010) and challenges its hegemonic ideology (Rich, 1980). TGNB people queer the institution of heterosexuality because heterosexuality's normative relationship between the biologically sexed body and socially performed gender is broken (Cromwell, 1999, Monro, 2010). Furthermore, these people resist the normative set of patterned behaviours and rituals meaning to be 'straight' acting and thinking, the basis of hegemonic heterosexuality (Ingraham, 2005). In Western culture, the identity categories of male, female, gay and straight, are created and

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institutionalised by behaviour patterns associated with marriage, family, politics, religion, work, education (Ingraham, 2005) medicine, the media, (Gagne et al., 1997, Carstarphen and Zavoina, 1999) and the internet (Siebler, 2012). However, the institution of heterosexuality is treated as the established, every-day, way of being and is reified in time and space.

It is both historically and culturally variable and consequently may be theoretically and empirically challenged (Cromwell, 1999, Fee, 2010, Hockey et al., 2007, Gabb, 2006, Sanger, 2010a, Atkinson and DePalma, 2009b, Butler, 1993, Foucault, 1994 [1981], Namaste, 1994). The essential point, for this review, is that this hegemonic structural ideology is open to small change and negotiation. The ideological hegemony of heterosexuality as an organising principle is constantly in contention and slowly mutating across cultures and time and is reliant upon straight identity performances (Shapiro, 2010). It depends on the exclusion of homosexual and TGNB identities but challenge precipitates identity slippage away from the hardened fixed identities of, for example, male, female, gay and straight. TGNB emergence specifically resists sex and gender ideological and hegemonic influences which has a consequence for young people in schools.

Contemporary research examines the barriers to TGNB young people's equality of opportunity in the structural context of institutional heterosexuality and the impact on their families, or as Horton (2020) puts it the effect of structural cisnormativity (everyone is either male or female). Cisnormativity within schools makes life for TGNB young people difficult, they have 'a triple burden of persistent often unintentional delegitimisation; having to, often single-handedly, educate about gender diversity and cisnormativity; and having to self-advocate for their right to a trans-inclusive school' (Horton, 2020:13).

Heteronormative practice in schools exposes TGNB young people to violence, 'discursive, psychological and physical' (McBride and Schubotz, 2017:295) leaving a need to be critical of its context and how it relates to these young people's intersectionality with other identifications. Normative identities are legitimate whereas TGNB identities are ambiguous and marginalised. This practice occurs in what is known as the hidden curriculum (Carrera-Fernández and DePalma, 2020), an unconscious area of understanding which occurs because of the ideological hegemony of institutional heterosexuality (Gramsci, 1971). Non-normative historical and current gender identities are silenced or absent in school curricular, for example, the reinforcement of 'certain erroneous or incomplete knowledge – such as the simplification of biological reality in sex education classes' (Carrera-Fernández and DePalma, 2020:749). In the light of this omission teachers may consequently fill gaps in knowledge with their own ideas because they have not been trained in these matters. Furthermore, 'Schools are never neutral; as agents of socialization, they may be sites for social reproduction or social transformation' (Carrera-Fernández and DePalma, 2020:750). Critique is required by educators so that oppressive ideas do not go unchallenged.

Gowen and Wings-Yanez (2014) elaborate and speak of passive silencing where LGBTQ issues are absent both in curricula and school discourse – specifically, in this discussion the absence of TGNB people. Silencing and the lack of a critical approach

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to diversity tends towards leaving students with an erroneous homogenous view of humanity (Wright-Maley et al., 2016). Guided by Choo (2019), such absence relegates the issue to risk factors, bullying and discrimination. Evidence of these is buried and the structural issues are never critically addressed. Conflict is avoided in the short term and nothing changes in the long term. In an educational setting the need to deal with this articulated by TGNB youth in Northern Ireland – there needs to be a range of interventions to counter this silencing (McBride and Schubotz, 2017). Heteronormative silencing is reinforced by some cis-normative older friends and other children censoring TGNB students over issues, for example, associated with dress (Davy and Cordoba, 2019). These researchers also mention that some TGNB student's parents are left, under duress, to deal with this by trying to support their child's mental health and school attendance. Parents felt that they needed 'to defend their child's gender explorations and their ongoing commitment to advocacy for them within school cultures' (Davy and Cordoba, 2019:363), furthermore, this role also leaves parents vulnerable (Neary and Cross, 2018).

Transgender identities challenge institutional heterosexuality with its fixed sex gender binaries – the natural order, often espoused by conservative Christian values (McBride and Schubotz, 2017), however, despite movements to challenge this cis-genderism remains 'stubbornly in place' (Atkinson and DePalma, 2009a:25). They continue to argue that transgender education violates childhood innocence a conception that Jackson (1982) maintains goes back as far as ancient Greece. Furthermore, such a rhetoric of the need to protect children is effortlessly taken as granted, natural and never to be critically challenged. The idea that transgender identities challenge the natural order of sex, gender and childhood is viscously and sarcastically attacked by some in the media as illustrated by this quote:

Have you had The Conversation with your children yet? Not the one about the birds and the bees, but the one about how some bees feel they are actually a bird trapped in a bee's body, or a bee trapped in a bird's body, or neither bee nor bird but somewhere in the middle of the bee–bird spectrum? (Atkinson and DePalma, 2009a:26).

Finally, concluding this section, I consider from a faith perspective research in Canadian Catholic schools which shows that younger people are shifting away from church teachings and becoming more pluralistic in accepting TGNB identities (Wright-Maley et al., 2016). However, in Northern Ireland with a history of conservative Christian values there has been a negative approach to LGBT rights in general (McBride and Schubotz, 2017).

## Chronosystems (reflective of the continuity and change within the environment over time)

### The genealogy of TGNB identities

In Europe prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century transgenderism was not named as such but considered to be a violation of male and female gender roles (Jones et al., 2015). During the 1980s many people associated transgenderism with being gay, the association probably had its origin in psychiatry where transgender and homosexual

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phenomena were historically conflated by Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840-1902) (Krafft-Ebing, 2006), an early sexologist. Later transsexuality was often confused with homosexuality and transvestism (Hirschfeld, 2006). Transsexuality only became publicly visible during the 1990s when it began to be disassociated with transvestism and homosexuality and became more understood (Sanger, 2010b, Stryker, 2006). This public understanding developed from the academic work of 'post-modern and post-structuralist feminisms from the 1980s and Queer theory in the 1990s' (Jones et al., 2015:160). These frames challenged essentialist notions of identity (male, female, gay, straight or otherwise) and posited gender as culturally constructed. Since then more positive representations of transgender identities have emerged from research focusing on embodiment and transgender narratives of life experience. However, these more recent framings 'do not simply 'replace' older ones, but coexist in tension with them, along with residual psychological frames reshaping inversion into newer concepts of gender identity disorder and gender dysphoria' (Jones et al., 2015:160).

In the 2010s, more gender affirming approaches to transgender children are developing because of greater recognition of the damage, abuse, rejection by families and use of conversion therapies experienced by these children in the past (Horton, 2020). Furthermore, TGNB young people are more visible because of government and non-government organisations and the media (Jones et al., 2015). TGNB young people's identities intersect and overlap with the other identities they may have, for example, 'sexuality, ethnicity, skin colour, class, disability and religion' (McBride and Schubotz, 2017:295). For example, these researchers report that 70% of their respondents (who live in their desired identification) are attracted to the same sex/gender peers. This variance requires recognition by all TGNB children's champions, teachers and support professionals.

I noted earlier that transgender young people are reported as being aware that their assigned birth sex/gender does not correspond with their inner sense of sex/gender identity at an early age somewhere between 3 and 10 years of age. The mismatch between this awareness and acquiring relevant knowledge causes confusion in their development of self-awareness and by others observing them (McBride and Schubotz, 2017). For example, there might still be a historical throwback to the confusion between transgender identity and homosexuality (or sexuality) as discussed above. The exploration of a TGNB child's gender identity is thus complex and ongoing with no clear endpoint which requires that those working with them give ongoing support (Jones et al., 2015). TGNB young people also explore their gender identity using social media and internet web-sites (McBride and Schubotz, 2017, Jones et al., 2015).

My personal experience is that there is much confusion and controversy in both the media and amongst the general public concerning TGNB children and medical treatment, recently ruled on by the UK High Court (Editorial, 2020). Only reversible social transition (clothes, hairstyle, activity choices) is recommended for TGNB children pre-puberty. After this when entering puberty medication may be given to put the usual body sex/gender body development on hold until the young person is capable, usually post 18 years, of making informed decisions about more permanent changes (Bethesda, 2014), however, in the light of the above court ruling this no longer applies in England and Wales. Evidence convincingly suggests that TGNB children who are supported by good 'family functioning ... family support ... and use of chosen

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name ... Informed by global healthcare best practices' (Horton, 2020:1) thrive well.

### Non-binary gender identities

There is a paucity of literature concerning non-binary young people and what does exist has sub-optimal methodology and little recognition of intersectionality (Chew et al., 2020, Horton, 2020). These young people do not conform to traditional binary understandings of sex (male-female). Under the 'non-binary umbrella are identities such as, 'genderqueer, genderless, gender-neutral, trigender, agender, third gender, two-spirit, and bi-gender [sic]. It is important to note that some youths with a non-binary gender identity do not identify as transgender at all' (Chew et al., 2020:322).

Genderqueer and genderfluid were the most popular descriptors. Chew et al. further report that most studies found no significant differences between young people with non-binary and binary identities in terms of birth-assigned sex, with both sets of young people presenting a higher ratio of young people assigned female at birth. However, the study of 839 Canadian trans-gender young people showed that significantly more non-binary young people (81.6%) were assigned female at birth than were binary transgender young people (69.9%) (Chew et al., 2020).

Non-binary young people are at greater risk of abuse and victimization than cis-gender peers and experience, 'increased marginalisation, were less involved in the community, and were less likely to have appropriate supports than were not only cisgender youth but also their binary transgender peers (who are already known to fare poorly across these domains)' (Chew et al., 2020:328).

They also have less access to health care and poorer mental health than binary transgender people and because of their vulnerability have a greater need for this care. Parents report that they feel that their children are officially unrecognised although, they are often accepted at school (Davy and Cordoba, 2019). These themes and findings should shape the ways in which schools support their transgender pupils, acknowledging the weaknesses of the current literature including limited consideration of non-binary children, and limited consideration of intersectionality (Horton, 2020:3).

Finally ending this section with a Catholic perspective I return to my earlier critique (Jenkins, 2019) of the Vatican document (Giuseppe, 2019). I argue that contemporary forms of gender fluid identities, GNB, are derived from Judith Butler and a socio-political ideology driven by a patriarchal understanding of male dominance and an excessive fixation with gender issues within the media and celebrity culture. Biology and gender are in fact complexly interrelated. However, the church reasonably argues that binary gender variance is considered by many to be an ontological basis of human understanding here the church reflects my understanding that sex and gender are significant forms of social stratification in almost all societies (ibid). Turning away from a gender identity-based discussion, I draw attention to the work of Anne Fausto-Stirling who essentially argues that sex (male-female) is determined by a complex interaction between the body and its environment - more recent research suggests that there may be a poly-genetic influence (ibid).

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Whatever the truth of these gender identity and bio-social essentialist issues turns out to be in the future, it is important that the TGNB children who are affected by these arguments are respected and receive appropriate pastoral care by the church and in their schools.

## Discussion

### What is the experience of TGNB young people in schools?

This analysis of the literature indicates that the paradigm of institutional heterosexuality/natural law is prevalent in Western culture. The hegemony of this system may be reinforced by physical violence (Jenkins, 2012), manifest by TGNB school children being bullied because of their non-normative TGNB identity expression and by peer and media (both social and print) policing. They are fearful and feel that their difference must be kept secret and hidden especially from those to whom they are close (ibid). Consequently, they may drop out of school or face sanctions and bullying. At the other softer extreme, their issues and concerns are erased by teachers and peers, leaving these actors anxious and caught between the reality of the presence of TGNB children and the hegemonic power of institutional heterosexuality – an issue I referred to in my doctoral research (ibid). Schools invariably accept, reinforce and reproduce the social oppression of TGNB children – the issues are often not addressed hidden behind the rhetoric of childhood innocence. School leaders face a complex problem: meeting the needs and rights of TGNB students; reacting to the hegemony of institutional heterosexuality/natural law; and being further required to provide high quality education for all pupils.

TGNB gender identities are complex and ongoing yet TGNB children are often able to express their inner feelings of dissidence from cis-normativity from the time they could communicate. I have shown (ibid) that transition is an enterprise submerged in risk, anxiety and uncertainty, contingent on the mutual understandings of intimates and simultaneously embedded within the dominant normative culture of a sex/gender dichotomy. Furthermore, the intention to transition may be a traumatic experience for both the TGNB child and their cis familial intimates. To support these children teachers and parents need to listen to their voices, experience, concerns, and priorities. In response to trepidation of loss of intimates and the pressure to suppress their inner sense of identity they may become distressed. If the resulting trauma is contained it can lead, in its most severe form, in attempts to end life.

This analysis has shown that peers can often be a means of support reinforcing research that shows “children are, in fact, quite ready to learn about gender diversity” (Martino et al., 2020:11). There is now strong evidence that socially transitioned children, who are supported have good levels of well-being and mental health. Furthermore, schools may use the plethora of available materials to provide good care for TGNB children. If a TGNB child first comes out to a trusted adult in school, there needs to be an awareness of the familial situation and safeguarding as parents may on disclosure react either negatively or positively. The pressure on the family will be significant and if they are supportive then often, they are faced with the additional task of educating the school about TGNB issues. This is because as the literature reveals schools are invariably not prepared to deal with this situation and are reactive often

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accompanied by a degree of panic which further adds to the pressure on families.

Older TGNB children will explore, unmoderated, their identity using social media and the internet. Research shows that the volume and quality of the material available to young people is not addressed in an informed way by educators (Jenkins, 2019). Furthermore, TGNB young people may experience cyberbullying which will negatively affect their mental health an issue schools should deal with. If teachers receive CPD related to TGNB children it is situated in a negative discourse of pathologisation, delegitimisation, problematisation, medicalization, and a deficit framing which leaves teachers feeling anxious about their ability to respond. Mangin (2019) further argues that leaders and research should reject this deficit model of TGNB young people and adopt, for example, culturally responsive, ethical, student-centred and social-justice leadership. Nevertheless, other empirical research (Landen, 2000) shows that trans children may benefit from situating their needs of acceptance by others in the psycho-medical model of transgenderism.

Why are the plethora of TGNB ‘toolkits’, policies and legislation **not operationalised to alleviate the systemic neglect** of TGNB young people in our schools?

Many schools look to authoritative leadership from government on TGNB issues which is lacking. For example, the recent RSE English statutory guidance emphasises devolved responsibility to schools concerning gender issues. However, this analysis of the literature shows that the use of the word gender by government is a diversity rhetoric which can be interpreted in different ways. Consequently, schools if attacked by transphobic forces are left in the situation of being open to wrongdoing whilst the government remains innocent. Teachers are required to make risky judgements about gender interpretation and become left in a reluctant and impotent position to teach about TGNB issues. Furthermore, school guidance documents seem not to address the effect of institutional heterosexuality pervading schools; and to allow TGNB children a voice. Martino et al argue that ‘there is indeed a reluctance on behalf of educators to “engage in gender affirming pedagogy . . . instead choosing to focus specifically on the safety and learning of individual transgender students”’ (Martino et al., 2020:3).

These researchers argue that the failure to address the hegemony of institutional hegemony prevents pedagogy about the expansiveness of gender and exacerbates the systemic oppression of TGNB children.

What are the experiences of TGNB young people in Catholic schools and how best are they revealed?

Many of the issues discussed above in research questions 1 and 2 are generic across schools and will apply to Catholic schools. These schools and teachers are torn between Catholic Social Teaching and the sexual ethics of the church. They are unable to respond, on the one hand to Pope Francis’ exaltation to address people at the peripheries of power, expressed in *Evangelii Gaudium* (Francis, 2013), (I argue (2019) that TGNB children are situated at the margins) and on the other hand

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reconciling the teaching in the Vatican education document (Giuseppe, 2019). Failure to address TGNB issues in the school milieu leaves their concerns opaque allowing children's prejudicial proclivities to develop without stewardship. Following Meadows and Wright's (2008) theory of systems, TGNB children in the Catholic school system are threatening to the power structures of the church leaving existing teaching to prevail. Consequently, resulting in the suppression of these children's academic and creative potential. Furthermore, the development of church teaching in this field of human experience is prevented. In conclusion, there is a need for church leaders to be responsive and school practice to evolve to show love for TGNB young people - the least of our children.

Does using Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework reveal the systematic oppression of TGNB young people in our schools?

The use of Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework has revealed the systemic oppression of TGNB young people in our schools. It has been a useful tool to structure and interpret the salient issues contained in the literature. Additionally, using NVIVO, I have been able to represent the themes, concepts and sentiments expressed in the literature to structure this review in a novel way, illuminating this oppression.

What are the implications of this analysis of the literature for educational policy and practice?

This systemic analysis of the literature concurs with that of other scholars (Martino et al., 2020) in the sense that whilst individual TGNB students are able to access resources and support there is little change in the hegemony of institutional heterosexuality/natural law pervading the school system. The implication is that school leaders struggle to sustain any initiatives supporting TGNB students over time and rejection and discrimination are perpetuated (Mangin, 2019). Following Meadows and Wright's (2008) primer, the absence of explicit official guidance concerning TGNB issues in schools allows the systemic hegemony of institutional heterosexuality/natural law to be maintained. To initiate change there needs to be a comprehensive study of the history of the system and its dynamics – further keys to the underlying forces and flows in educational structures. Nevertheless, any significant change usually takes time, however, there is scope to speed this up through a deeper qualitative investigation of the situation of TGNB children in schools. This will reveal their contextual lived experience and a focus on how the wider system fails to improve their educational encounters and outcomes. The results create the opportunity to influence change agents of governance, who have the real power in the education system. The domain is the explicit rubrics by which schools operate – to influence change of these rules is the location of real transformation.

Turning now to consider Relationships and Sex Education Guidance (Education, 2019) in England. There is no guidance in this document concerning TGNB issues and consequently any school practice to be monitored and enforced by Ofsted even though the document has the status of being statutory – it is not possible to inspect something that is legislatively omitted. This analysis has discussed the problems that ensue, for example, the use of the diversity rhetoric of gender. Other research has

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shown the importance for school leaders of specific governance policies and curricula that addresses TGNB children's needs (Martino et al., 2020) and additionally for appropriately focussed CPD (Mangin, 2019).

Concerning Catholic education, I have argued elsewhere (2019) that the exclusionary heteronormative privileging of natural law is sociologically inadequate in explaining the lived reality of TGNB children's identities and the messy realities of contemporary family life – should this teaching be more flexible? Sex and gender are complexly related and so is determining the understanding of bio/social sex differences. It is important that TGNB children who are affected by these religio-theoretical arguments are respected and receive appropriate pastoral care by the church and in schools – there needs to be a careful process of discernment. However, I trust that Church leaders will grasp the opportunity to follow Jesus in its pastoral care - to radically develop its practice in a way that is merciful and releases tenderness and love towards all TGNB people and children. In this way it will compassionately privilege the personal situation of the individual in need over religious ideals and structures that oppress people. In England and Wales the following need to be revisited: the Catholic Education Service model curricula; guidance on 2010 Equalities Act; the tensions for Catholic educators between individual conscience and existing doctrine; and the inauthentic situation of LGBT+ Catholic teachers highlighted by the teachings of *Gaudium et Spes* (Paul, 1962-5).

[Further research suggested by the findings of this systemic analysis of the literature.](#)

This analysis shows that research in the field of TGNB children's experiences in education (both secular and Catholic) is limited. Mangin (2019) highlights some small scale empirical studies and work done on the history of transgender people in school, inclusive curricula and CPD. In the light of the systemic oppression of TGNB children revealed here and by Mangin there is a clear critical need for further research, however, such research does not decrease the needs of cis children.

Drawing on systems theory, (Meadows and Wright, 2008), if actors try to change the system paradigm of institutional heterosexuality/natural law then there will be resistance. A way out of this is to look for a win-win situation or to strive towards more important goals that all can realise, such as structural modification. Nevertheless, change at this level is difficult because this structure has evolved in response to cultural and human need and anthropological emotions, strengths and weaknesses.

To develop a methodology for change, Meadows and Wright (2008) offer some crucial conceptual points of reference within the school system. Questions for researchers in this field might be to consider where are the boundaries, are they situated outside of Bronfenbrenner's vantage points developed in this analysis? Or are there other ways of considering the issues, perhaps, for example, from the vantage point of race/ethnicity, discussed earlier in this analysis? Or from medicine using Choo's (2019) perspective of generic systemic oppression. These vantage points are not always intuitive. As stated earlier in this discussion the paradigms of institutional heterosexuality/natural law are not easily changed. However, Meadows and Wright suggest that a strategy might be to 'keep pointing at the anomalies and failures in the old paradigm. You keep speaking and acting, loudly and with assurance, from the new

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one' (Meadows and Wright, 2008:164). They further suggest the need to be selective and only work with positive change agents. In our case, we need to further research the experiences of TGNB children in schools and work with teachers, leaders and those working in education policy/structure. - seeking change agents who are sympathetic to the plight of TGNB children. Finally, Meadows and Wright suggest observing the system and its behaviour over time.

Plummer (1995) offers a qualitative narrative approach which will allow conceptualisation of the interface between the personal and the social experiences of TGNB children and their associates (parents, teachers, peers ...) illuminating their personal and psychic investment in the conventional sex/gender identifications of our heterosexual paradigm. Martino et al (2020) further suggests a case study methodology which focuses on the educators of TGNB children.

The close intimates of TGNB children are likely to experience the transition of a TGNB child (from birth assigned sex/gender) as a loss of previous identity which is grieved because of the hegemony of institutional heterosexuality (Jenkins, 2012). This has implications for how parents react some, as this analysis has found, will be supportive and others unsupportive of the TGNB child. Future research will need to explore the implications of this further – cis fathers might also need consideration as men are less likely to welcome transition (ibid). Mangin (2019) is helpful in stressing that parental support is conducive to a positive experience for schools and TGNB children.

Finally, it has been generally recognised that establishing a new gender identity is more difficult for trans women than for men (Lev, 2004; Green, 2006; Kessler and McKenna, 2006; Whittle, 2006b; Johnson, 2007). The hegemony of normative sex/gender embodiment requires that trans women are not dissonantly understood as being different from the normative category of women. What are the implications of this for trans boys and girls in schools? There is a tendency to try and normalise post-transition trans identities, a proclivity identified by Gabb (2006) and Atkinson (2009), what are the implications for GNB children in schools – this analysis of the literature shows that there is a paucity of research concerning these children who do not conform to binary norms?

## Endnote

Finally in conclusion, the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci wrote 'the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear' (Gramsci, 1971). In this review I have argued that the modernist framework of institutional heterosexuality/natural law is inadequate to fully explain the human lived situation of TGNB children both in schools and in society. The use of Bronfenbrenner's framework reveals the ecological of oppression of these children. The old is dying yet a fuller eco-scientific understanding of the relationship between sex and gender is yet to emerge. These issues need to be actively addressed both at the personal and ecological levels to avoid the morbid symptoms of oppression of TGNB children's experience in wider society and reflected in schools. This requires that the post-modern understanding of celebrity culture and the seemingly enduring persistence of patriarchy require attention which I argue explain the aetiology of GNB young people's



identifications (Jenkins, 2019). The new needs to be born so that the common good of all is realised and TGNB children's full flourishing and human dignity is released.

### Sam's story late 2000s first half 2010s

Early in September 2020 I did a recorded telephone interview (his permission and anonymity were agreed) with Sam a 22-year-old trans man. I asked him to recall his recent experience of being transgender in school during the end of the 2000s and first half of 2010s. Here is part of the transcription.

Sam: Throughout school I tried fitting in like a lot of people do ... I just needed to suppress being a boy because I knew that I would get ridiculed if I came out ... there was really nothing, I don't think I really heard of it at that age ... I had to look it up on-line ... I remember Googling I feel like a boy in a girl's body... using social media and things like that ... I remember contacting Child Line about it ... I had red hair, immediately I was bullied for that ... if I was bullied for something like red hair, I was going to be bullied for something like transgender ... there were a few people coming out [as gay/lesbian] then, may be two ... I remember there was a girl a couple of years below me ... she was the talk of the school ... well, If I was being teased about my hair, I did not want to add to the list of things I could be bullied for ...

Me: did you have personal sex or health education?

Sam: I can't recall anything ... there definitely wasn't anything LGBT based.

Me: That's amazing, I went to school in the 60s it was the same thing then as in the 1990s.

Sam: really wow.

Me: We are talking 40 to 50 years ago.

Sam: Well, I imagine now it is a lot different, I left secondary school in 2015 and there was nothing ... it was pretty awful.

Me: Oh dear.



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