

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

“It's Already Hard Enough Being a Student”: Developing Affirming College Environments for Trans Youth

Singh, A. A., Meng, S., & Hansen, A. (2013). “It's already hard enough being a student”: Developing affirming college environments for trans youth. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 10(3), 208-223. doi:10.1080/19361653.2013.800770

SUMMARY: Transgender individuals have unique needs within various environments. This study used qualitative methods to identify factors that helped transgender individuals experience resilience and thrive within college environments. Participants identified multiple concrete actions taken by school staff and community members that made them feel included and welcomed into the school.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Students identified the use of chosen names, preferred pronouns, and general inclusive language as basic steps that created the foundation for an affirming environment.
- Participants highlighted the need for education for teachers, staff, and peers about transgender issues.
- Being able to create a community of advocates and allies (e.g., family, friends, staff) protected against the negative effects of a broader environment that was not welcoming.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Ask people their preferred name and pronouns
- Seek out information about issues that affect transgender individuals in the context of military families

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Intentionally work with community members to create a group of allies who advocate for the needs of transgender individuals in the context of military families
- Use language that is neutral and inclusive of the experiences of multiple groups (e.g., “partner” instead of “boyfriend” or “girlfriend”)

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to encourage the development of inclusive, welcoming, safe programs for military youth
- Recommend training for professionals who work with military families regarding inclusion and how to support a diverse group of individuals

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited through electronic mailing lists and posts on social media.
- Semi-structured interviews lasting 45 to 90 minutes were conducted with participants regarding their experiences in college.
- Researchers coded interviews to identify themes throughout participant experiences, with a focus on resilience and strategies used for self-advocacy.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 17 students between the ages of 15 and 25 years who identified as transgender or transsexual, with an average age of 22 years old.
- Of the 17 participants, 10 identified as a trans guy or trans man, 3 identified as male, 2 identified as female-to-male, and 2 identified as genderqueer.
- With regard to race, 77% of participants were White, 18% were Multiracial, and 6% were Asian American.
- Seven of the participants were college graduates, seven were current college students, one had earned an associate's degree, one had medically withdrawn from college, and one had dropped out of college.

LIMITATIONS

- The participants in this study opted to participate. They may differ from those who did not participate in ways that could influence results (e.g., they may have been more vocal advocates for themselves in the educational setting).
- Researchers made an attempt, through reflexive journals, to limit the effect of personal biases; however, it is possible that researchers' assumptions influenced the type of questions asked and the way in which responses were coded.
- Most participants were White and identified as transgender men, so results may not extend to other populations.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Investigate the experiences of transgender women and transgender people of color in school settings
- Evaluate the effectiveness of different interventions that aim to increase inclusivity
- Utilize a structured set of interview questions or validated measures to reduce the effect of researcher bias

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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