QUALITATIVE ARTS-BASED INQUIRY INTO TRANSGENDER SUBJECTIVITIES IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

By

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Abstract

Through the use of arts-based practices and qualitative research methods, this thesis explores the experiences of individuals who identify as transgender (trans) and have studied social work at a Canadian university. By eliciting transgender perspectives on social work education, this research hopes to make visible elements of trans identities within social work and gain insight into the ways in which social work education approaches gender transgression. By engaging with trans perspectives, this research strives to initiate a dialogue about how to increase awareness and acceptance of gender diversity within the discipline of social work. Recommendations in the thesis focus on ways to create safer environments for trans students in schools of social work as well as increasing non-trans students capacity to provide services to the trans population.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Acknowledgments

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesisr to all of the trans "warriors" who have had the courage to battle for their identities and their lives.

Chapter One: Opening Remarks

Researcher Perspective

This research is based on a number of assumptions both about the topic and the research process in general; some of these assumptions will be explicitly unveiled in this section while others will be naturally exposed throughout the paper. First, I fundamentally assume that trans[1] peoples' perspectives are valuable and that trans individuals have the ability to effect social change. Any acknowledgement of the destructive effects that discrimination and marginalization have had on trans individuals should not be read as discounting the ability of trans people to live healthy and happy lives. Furthermore, it is assumed, that in spite of the appearance of Gender Identity Disorder in the fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM IV), trans people are not mentally ill based exclusively on the fact that they are trans. It is assumed that exploring and shifting one's gender is not an unnatural process and that trans is a normal and healthy variation of human expression (Lev, 2004).

I have approached this study with the assumption that there is the possibility for more than two genders within human expression and that gender identity is self-determined. With this in mind, for the purpose of this thesis, when speaking generally about people and in cases where the gender preference of the person being referred to is unknown, I will be using the gender-neutral pronouns "sie" to replace he/she and "hir" to replace his/her (Feinberg, 1998). The use of these gender neutral pronouns not only acknowledges the possibility of more than two genders within human expression, but disrupts the common practice of putting everything into gendered categories, even when gender has little or nothing to do with what

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[1] Although there has been recent discussion about the term "trans" replacing transgender as an umbrella term because transgender has its own meaning which does not fit with certain gender identities within the trans umbrella, for the purpose of this document, the term transgender and trans will be considered interchangeable.

is being discussed. Although I have adopted these terms in this context, I would like to point out that there are limits to these terms; in my personal experience, most people find these unfamiliar gender-neutral pronouns difficult to incorporate into their daily speech. They can consequently have the effect of further 'othering' the individual who uses them. In many gender-transgressive communities, the gender-neutral pronoun "they" has been adopted into everyday language in reference to individuals who do not identify as male or female. If a transgender individual has specifically articulated that sie identifies with a specific gender, it is respectful to use whatever gendered pronoun reflects hir chosen gender identity, no matter how hir gender presentation may appear or what sex sie was assigned at birth. Consequently, I will be using self-reported gender pronouns when possible. Although I am approaching this document with the assumption that there are more than two legitimate gender expressions, I am not proposing that the rejection of the gender binary is a condition of being trans. Many trans individuals see themselves as men or women. I believe that both accepting and rejecting the gender binary are appropriate expressions and that neither expression is more politically progressive than the other. Like many other aspects of identity, transgender is nuanced and can contain paradoxes that co-exist side by side.

With regards to the research process, it is assumed that this research will be seen as the (re)presentation of meanings that have been co-created by participants and the researcher. As Kohler-Riessman (1993) suggested, "obviously the agency of the teller is central to composing narratives from personal experience, but so are the actions of others –listener, transcriber, analyst, and reader" (p. 15). It is my belief that the presentation of ethnographic research in which the voice of the researcher remains invisible can be problematic; therefore, I will aim to acknowledge the ways in which I, as a researcher, am actively engaged in co-

creating the text. Furthermore, with representational issues in mind, it is my assumption that qualitative social science research must not be considered as an absolute representation of social phenomena but rather a container for insights that are partial, situated, and fluid. This approach to research will be further explored in the methodology section.

Finally, in approaching arts-based practices in research, it will be assumed that all people are creative. Operating within an academic culture that is focused on evaluation, expressing oneself creatively may evoke a sense of vulnerability for participants. The artwork that the participants were invited to engage in thus functioned as an entrance into exploring their experiences and was analyzed in terms of the meanings that it created for participants; it was not critiqued or judged by the researcher for its aesthetic value.

Boundaries of the Study

The research aims to highlight *some* perspectives of *some* individuals who identify as transgender and have studied social work at university. This research does not make claims to represent the position of any transgender communities at large. Furthermore, in spite of the best efforts made by the researcher to make the participants voices central, the representational form in which the research has been presented may not completely reflect the experiences of the participants.

This project is intended to look at transgender perspectives in specific relation to social work education. It is not meant to give insight into transgender emergence or elicit personal reflections on participants' transgender identity in general. Although the research has aimed to highlight particular transgender perspectives on social work, it is not meant to give readers an insider's view of 'what it's like to be trans' or other such exoticizing practices. Though the goal of this research is not to produce knowledge that is absolute, it

does hope to contribute to an understanding of the ways in which the discipline of social work treats gender transgression and fuel a necessary dialogue about the how to make the climate in schools of social work more committed to acknowledging, accepting, and supporting gender diversity.

Due to the fact that gender is a social category, the implications of gender variance are shaped by societal and cultural influences. The meaning and acceptance of gender variance, therefore, differs across different cultural and historical contexts. Although there are examples of gender variant experiences throughout history and across various cultures (Martin & Yonkin, 2006), this project is situated in a Western cultural context and is thus reflective of that location. Furthermore, the research was conducted in English and is, therefore, also limited to capturing that perspective. As Namaste (2005) pointed out, there are significant linguistic and cultural differences between French and English Canada that often go unacknowledged when thinking about trans issues in Canada.

At the time of writing this thesis, I have a limited amount of social work practice experience. I, therefore, consider my location to be largely within academia. As a consequence of this location, my topic of inquiry, the examination of transgender perspectives on social work education, is positioned within the academy. In spite of this, I believe that social work research and practice are overlapping fields that should not be thought of as separate. Herising (2005) challenged the notion that there is a single point in time in which one is a 'researcher', and proposed that the separation between research and practice into two spaces has become a means of ignoring the flaws in social work practice which neglects "the process by which social work develops, analyzes, and replenishes itself in the everyday" (p. 129). In order to destabilize this division between practice and research I

have aimed to incorporate community practice outcomes into my research by employing arts-based research practices. In this context, community practice entails working with a group, connected by common interests and goals, towards gaining skills and confidence to impact social change (Heinonen & Spearman, 2006). As Leavy (2009) pointed out, arts-based research "adapts the tenets of the creative arts in order to address social research questions in a *holistic* and *engaged* way in which *theory and practice are intertwined*" (p. 3).

Personal Connection to Transgender Issues

As a transmasculine person who has existed in various stages of being 'out' as trans within both the social work discipline in academia and a variety of social service work environments, I have a very direct and personal connection to the subject matter. Though in my studies I have adopted a rather deconstructionist perspective, it is important for me to emphasize that my trans identity itself is not a consequence of a postructural philosophy nor is it an academic/conceptual condition. Being trans is personal and is something that I feel very deeply in my body, in my essence, and in my interactions with others. As a 'no-ho, no-opp' (no hormone, no operation) trans individual, situating my identity in lived experience is important because non-transsexual trans people have been criticized (i.e. by Namaste, 2005) for centering their identity in a utopic philosophy of gender desconstructionism rather than in the real world.

My trans identity is situated and anchored to both a point in time and space and I find that gender does not operate in isolation but interlocks with, intersects with, overlaps, reinforces, and informs other elements of my social class. I fundamentally recognize that my perspective has been influenced by a host of privileges that have shaped my experiences. I

have privilege gained from being white, middle class, educated, able bodied, and mentally stable. However, I still consider my personal location within the subject to be a strength.

Absolon and Willett (2005) proposed that "claiming your personal space within your research and writing counters objectivity and neutrality with subjectivity, credibility, accountability, and humanity" (p. 113). My personal connection to the inquiry, therefore, will be explored more deeply through autoethnographical content that will be woven throughout my thesis.

Chapter Two: Literature Review/Defining key Concepts

Conceptualizing Transgender

Gender is a fundamental social organizing principle within the current Western paradigm that impacts almost every aspect of an individual's life. The dominant discourse in our society, as expressed through various social, cultural, and political fields, promotes the belief that it is 'natural' for one's gender to be either man or woman, and to be consistent with the sex assigned to hir at birth. In this context, the term 'sex' refers to the status of either male or female that is assigned to an individual based on biology, while the term 'gender' refers to the social role that one plays and one's internal sense of being a man, a woman, or something different. Butler (1990) suggested that gender is a performance, and that all individuals have the capacity to alter their outward appearance to align with their internal sense of gender identity. Gender is performed through such visual presentations as dress, grooming, and behaviour. In our present culture, performing gender, however, is not usually motivated by an internal sense of self, but rather by the demands of society. Gender is continually assessed and, as Burdge (2007) put forth,

> the outcome of that assessment determines whether or not we are rewarded or
>
> sanctioned (for example, are ignored, receive awkward stares, receive threats, or
>
> experience violence). Children learn at an early age that they must accomplish gender
>
> successfully to be considered competent social actors. (p. 246)

In our society, individuals become so entrenched in the gender myth that they reify the gender binary by monitoring and enforcing others as well as themselves.

Assignment of one of two genders at the time of birth is a virtually uncontested dominant social practice. Gender assignment at birth is so prevailing that even children who

are born without clear sexual traits are relegated to one of only two genders. As Burdge (2007) explained, "even in cases in which the genitalia are ambiguous, medical professionals and families generally pursue surgical modifications to make one gender fit... very literally, our bodies must fit our words" (p. 245). From the moment of gender assignment at birth, one's location within the binary gender system is reified in countless ways, both socially and structurally, from the M or F that is on a person's driver's license to the awkward stares and potentially violent attacks that occur if one does not conform to the prescribed gender norms.

In spite of the promotion of a binary gender system in the dominant discourse, where an individual's gender is 'naturally' either man or woman and consistent with the sex assigned to them at birth, transgender communities show that neither sex nor gender is bi-polar, and that there is, in fact, a wide range of human diversity of both sex and gender. Lev (2004) and Mallon (2009) defined "transgender" as an umbrella term relevant to a diversity of individuals who express their gender in non-dominant ways. Trans has commonly come to refer to anyone who finds their internal sense of self as female, male, or other to be dissonant with the gender role that was assigned to them at birth. The modality of transgender embraces a variety of possibilities for embodiment and identification. Some sub-identities within trans communities consist of those who self-identify as genderqueers, drag queens/kings, cross dressers, bigenders, two spirits, gender fucks, gender b(l)enders, transsexuals, female-male, and male-female. Even though these subcategories, like the term transgender, often defy stable definition, it is important to note that the term transsexual generally refers to individuals who have pursued medical interventions. The term transgender itself was developed in gender communities in order to encompass the wide variety of gender-variant individuals, and include those who do not prescribe to the protocols and

stability associated with transexuality, yet still live in a manner that transgresses gender norms (Halsberstam, 2005). Though individuals in transgender communities have different circumstances, and make different choices about how to negotiate being trans (from sex-reassignment surgery to transgressing gender norms through dress and performance), this research will treat "transgender" as a single field of study. This will be done on the basis that there are various social and structural inequities shared by all those who transgress gender norms. A further discussion about differences within trans communities can be found in the *diversity, divisions and the importance of intersectionality* section of this document.

Though transgender is a category of self-identification, it is important to point out that discrimination based on gender expression is not confined to those who identify as transgender. 'Butch lesbians', for example, may not identify as trans, but often experience the same discrimination as trans identified individuals. Spade (2003) proposed the use of the term "gender-transgressive" to capture the wide range of experiences of discrimination that stem from non-conformity to our culture's narrowly defined 'maleness' or 'femaleness' as it is associated with our gender assigned at birth. The term 'gender-variant' also encapsulates this broad range of experiences, and, in the context of the literature in the discipline of social work, is often used interchangeably with transgender.

When conceptualizing transgender, it is important to point out that transgender is a category of *self-identification* that is adopted by individuals who find their sense of self to be dissonant with the gender assigned to them at birth. Transgender identity, therefore, is not a category that is imposed upon someone. As transgender communities evolve in resistance to an oppressive and coercive gender binary system, the language used in its articulation also evolves. The language used to describe transgender individuals contains a mixture of terms

imposed on transgender people by the medical community, and those defined and

constructed by trans communities themselves. Transgender academia has emphasized the

importance of framing transgender as a social and political term rather than as a medical one.

This allows for the subjective experiences of transgender individuals and communities to be

brought forward over those of objective medical perspectives (Scott-Dixon, 2006).

Although for many individuals, transgender identity is considered an authentic

expression of gender that is inherent to hir internal understanding of self and not a choice, the

adoption of a transgender identity is a conscious act of becoming. While the dominant

discourse supports the concept that the categories of 'women' and 'men' are categories that

one is born into, through the movement and settlement between gender categories,

transgender communities expose how gender is an act of becoming for everyone. Although

individual gender-transgression is the basic tenet of transgender identity, as Halsberstam

(2005) argued, the term transgender is a term of relationality that "describes not simply an

identity but a relation between people, within a community, or within intimate bonds" (p.

49). Transgender is a term, therefore, that refers to individuals who have taken on a trans

identity, and whose bodies and experiences transgress gender rules in a variety of relations

within their social and political environments.

Transgender and the LGBT Category

Much of the research and literature available on the subject of transgender individuals

within the discipline of social work encapsulates transgender into the category of 'LGBT'

(lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender), and collapses the experiences of transgender

individuals with those of gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals. Sexuality and gender expression

represent distinctly different elements of identification. As Kaufman (2008) put it, "gender

identity and sexual orientation can be aptly distinguished by thinking about gender identity as

the way a person feels inside about their gender (self) and, thinking about sexual orientation

as the gender(s) a person is attracted to (other)" (p. 335). Although there is validity and

strength in unifying the two causes, and ways in which studies that focus on lesbian, gay, and

bisexual people can be generalized to the transgender population, there are also some distinct

problems with the categorization. One reason the category is problematic is that trans

identities, in particular those identities that defy unitary forms of gender, actually work

towards destabilizing the premise upon which our society has constructed categories of

sexual orientation. Heterosexual, gay, lesbian, and bisexual all rely on sex/gender binary

forms of classification (Monro, 2007). Stryker (2008) argued that, because of this reliance on

the dominant gender constructions, lesbian, gay, and bisexual often have more in common

with the straight world than they do with trans communities. Sexual orientation and gender

expression are distinctly different fields, and defining gender variance in relation to, and in

terms of, sexuality disregards many of the unique issues of the transgender population,

including how gender identity impacts every aspect of a person's daily life. In the social

work literature that claims to examine the LGBT population, many disregard the 'T'

completely and neither define nor consider transgender experiences in the research. In

addition, although there are many positive attempts at inclusion, transgender people are still

sometimes discriminated against within gay, lesbian and bisexual communities (Elliot, 2010).

Diversity, Divisions and the Importance of Intersectionality

For the purpose of this study, due to various social and structural inequities shared by

all gender variant people, transgender will be treated as a single category. Though, as stated

previously, transgender is far from a unified field. Not only is there a wide range of

individual diversity within trans communities, but there are also key conceptual divisions

within transgender scholarship that must be acknowledged. Elliot (2010) proposed that some

of these rifts include:

> divergent conceptions of trans subjects held by non-trans feminists; divergent and
>
> hierarchical relationships between transgender and transsexual persons; divergent and
>
> conflicting claims about gender intelligibility; divergent emphases on sameness and
>
> difference in theorizing trans experiences and identities; and divergent attributions of
>
> gender and sexual embodiment to psychosocial factors. (p. 3)

As Elliot asserted, ignoring divisions threatens to undermine collective potential. The rift that

may impact this study the most is the divergent and hierarchical relationship between

transsexual and transgender individuals. According to Namaste (2005), some transsexual

individuals object to being included under the transgender umbrella because the specificity of

the health care and social service needs of transsexuals is lost in the vagueness of the term

"transgender". In reference to the term , Feinberg (1998), however, proposed that, while the

term may prove inadequate or short-lived, it is a tool to bring people together to battle

bigotry and brutality, which aims to capture the similarities of the oppressions endured. As

someone who does not currently identify as transsexual, throughout this study I will be

cautious of this divide and do my best to respect the unique position of this group.

Beyond acknowledging the realities of different gender identities under the trans

umbrella, when looking at trans experiences, I feel it is important to consider how trans

intersects with other social locations. Some postmodern feminists propose that specific

identity categories, such as that of 'woman', be replaced with the notion of a plural and social

identity that consists of many interrelated strands including gender, class, race, ethnicity, age,

and sexual orientation (Saulinier, 1996, p.139). Instead of discarding these categories completely, I propose that we consider how they intersect. Discarding specific categories that describe social locations has the potential of making invisible the power dynamics implicit in the relationality of these categories, as well as depoliticizing and fragmenting community organizing around specific identities. Even though categories that describe social location are not universal, and do not encapsulate the full range of experiences of all the members within it, there is often a shared experience of existing outside of the norm.

As transgender is a relational category, like gender in general, it is constructed differently in different locations. Without taking into consideration other social locations, transgender politics have the potential of contributing to other oppressive forces. For example, Namaste (2005) argued that the focus of political actions taken by middle class transgender people in North America, such as health care and law reform, are essentially imperialist in the way that they impose economic and cultural values and leave out trans individuals with diverse social class distinctions.

Transgender as Concern for Social Work

The Canadian Association of Social Workers' (CASW) "Social Work Code of Ethics" states that "social workers oppose prejudice and discrimination against any person or group of persons, on any grounds, and specifically challenge views and actions that stereotype particular persons or groups" (CASW, 2005, p.5). The transgender population is relevant to the discipline of social work because, as a result of existing outside of society's dominant understanding of gender, they are markedly vulnerable to discrimination and often face many material, social, and psychological consequences.

Understanding the transgender population as a concern for social work requires a basic understanding of how power and oppression operate. Heinonen and Spearmen (2006) define power as the "ability to imagine something or to make a choice and then implement the actions so that the imagined something or the choice becomes a reality" (p. 249). Oppression takes away an individual's ability to achieve this power. Dominelli (2002) proposed that through the creation of oppressive relationships the dominant group denies "agency in those whom they deem inferior. Furthermore, the ruling group defines the lesser position of those at the bottom of the social pile as one of passivity that has little scope for change" (p.8). Marginalization is the process by which whole groups of people are excluded from useful and meaningful participation in society, which can lead to severe material, social, cultural, and spiritual depravation (Mullaly, 2007).

As Herbst (2001) suggested, "political and verbal attacks on LGBT communities have been unyieldingly justified on religious, moral and sometimes also medical grounds" (p. xvii) Society's acceptance of a dominant group's claim to rational truth reinforces unequal power by devaluing, disadvantaging, silencing, and making invisible non-dominant perspectives. For example, the dominant culture assumes that there *is* gender, that there are two categories of gender and that we have either one or the other (Bornstein, 1994). Dominelli (2002) pointed out that oppressors draw "on mechanisms of normalization that promote dominant values and priorities to impose a range of social control systems aimed at curtailing the activities of the subordinate groups within the ground the dominant group designates as legitimate" (p.8). Individuals who challenge this truth and exist outside of the dominant discourse, such as transgender individuals, are consequently vulnerable to the impacts of oppression.

McGrath, George, Lee, & Moffatt (2007) argued that individuals in the LGBT community have been unable to experience full civic participation as valued citizens because they have been highly regulated through police surveillance, legal action, social ostracism, and moral judgment. This exclusion from full civic participation and valued citizenship has resulted in material, social, and political consequences. Poverty is one of those consequences. The Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) (2009) reported that transgender persons experience severe economic hardship due to the difficulties in accessing medical and insurance services, discrimination in the workplace, and social and economic marginalization. Mirha-Soleil Ross, the coordinator of 'Meal Trans,' a program for transgender people in Toronto, stated that 90% of the people who utilize their program earn less than $10,000 a year" (OHRC, 2009, Poverty section, para. 1). Poverty can be extremely impactful on an individual's life, for example, poor people face social exclusion and the denial of the opportunity to participate actively in their community (Lundy, 2004) which, in the case of trans individuals, may exacerbate their isolation.

As McPhail (2008) pointed out, transgender individuals exhibit characteristics of a population at risk. Mallon (2009) suggested that elements of oppression faced by individuals in transgender communities include "isolation, self-hatred, underachievement or overachievement, substance abuse, problems with relationships, and a variety of other mental health matters" (p. 30). Transgender individuals are also at a high risk for lack of access to basic mental and physical healthcare, unemployment or underemployment, homelessness, sex work, and violent hate crimes (Kaufman, 2008). Kaufaman noted:

> a problem in one area quickly leads to a problem in another. For example, financial
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> problems resulting from unemployment can lead to loss of medical insurance (and

subsequent poorer access to health care), as well as homelessness and reliance on sex work for income (with associated increased risk for various negative outcomes, including violence, substance abuse, and HIV). (p. 341)

Individuals who experience one problem can easily develop another and become caught in a cycle of oppression.

The risk of suicide is also of particular concern with regards to the trans population (Clements-Noelle, Marx, & Katz, 2006; Trans PULSE 2010). The Trans PULSE program (2010) did a study of trans individuals in Ontario and found that 50% of the 243 trans people surveyed had seriously considered suicide because they were trans and an additional 27% reported considering suicide for unrelated reasons; this means that three quarters of the trans people surveyed had seriously considered suicide. The researchers also found that 43% of their sample had attempted suicide. This risk of suicide shows that suffering and hopelessness exists within trans communities. Clements- Noelle et al. (2006) found in their study of trans youth that suicide was associated with a history of substance use, coerced sex, and gender-based discrimination and victimization. This suggests that suicide risk in trans communities must be considered a social rather than personal issue and that the marginalization of trans people must be addressed when considering the risk of suicide among trans individuals.

As a marginalized population at risk, transgender communities should be of concern for the discipline of social work; however, as it sits, transgender appropriate services are limited, and there are significant barriers for gender variant individuals who are trying to access existing service (Goldberg et al., 2006). Many organizations do not even recognize the existence of transgender individuals. McGrath et al. (2007) found that those in the LGBT

community, including transgender individuals, have experienced marginalization through the ongoing historical refusal to acknowledge their existence in social service organizations. Pierce (2001) suggested that 'shunning' would be an appropriate term to describe society's response to the transgender community.

The human impact of not having social services that are competent at working with this unique population is extreme. Transgender youth are particularly vulnerable members of our society. Burgess (1999) found that transgender youth cannot always depend on their families to offer a safe haven. Parents are often ill equipped to understand their transgendered child. Families are often not only unable to empower their transgender youth, but also may even further contribute to perpetuating societal oppression (Burdge, 2007). The OHRC (2009) found that families of transgender people, including parents, spouses, and children, reported that they lacked the resources to obtain the support and understanding they needed in order to be free from discrimination. McGrath (2007) reported that, within communities in Canada, because of prejudicial treatment, community members, who had lost the support of family, often had trouble gaining equitable access to social services. As a result of the loss of informal supports and the barriers to accessing formal supports, transgender individuals were found, especially in the case of adolescents, to not have access to proper material care in terms of housing, health services, and food. They were, therefore, vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation, and poverty.

Oppression can manifest itself in many different ways in an individual's life and, in some circumstances, become internalized. As Lundy (2004) remarked, for individuals who are "members of a group that has been historically and/or systemically exploited and discriminated against, there is a possibility that he or she may to varying degrees internalize

the damaging messages and in the process feel powerless to change the situation" (p. 129).

Internalized oppression can cause transgender individuals to experience a number of

psychosocial difficulties, such as low self-esteem, that go beyond healthy gender exploration.

Transgender seniors can also be in particularly vulnerable positions. Though the

major concerns for transgender seniors were found to be akin to most other aging adults

(loneliness, health, and income), these concerns are often drastically exacerbated by a variety

of consequences associated with being trans. These consequences include social stigma and

isolation from family and/or gay and lesbian communities, barriers to accessing health care

and social services, and economic discrimination (Persson, 2009). The gap in the literature

with regards to social work and transgender seniors indicates that resources available to this

population are scarce.

The threat of violence is another particularly problematic aspect of the oppression

faced by transgender people. The Trans PULSE program (2010) reported that "because they

were trans, 20% of trans Ontarians have been the targets of physical or sexual assaults and

another 34% have experienced verbal harassment or threats" (p. 1). Although I could not find

any statistics specific to Canada, Kaufman (2008) reported that the murder rate for

transgender people in the United States of America is disproportionately high; in 1999 the

transgender murder rate was six times greater than the national average and three times

greater than African American men, who have the next highest recorded rate. An increased

risk of suicide has been strongly linked to trans-related violence. The Trans PULSE project

(2010) found that those who experienced trans-related violence "were almost twice as likely

to have seriously considered suicide within the past year as those who have not experienced

trans-related violence or verbal harassment, and over seven times as likely to have attempted

it" (p.1). When considering violence against transgender individuals, it is also important to

acknowledge that hate crimes do not solely affect individuals but can, in fact, terrorize whole

communities. According to Lindhorst (1998), the simple threat or fear of violence can

produce difficulties in emotional coping and acceptance of self.

The medicalization and pathologizing of gender variant identities is an arguably

discriminatory practice in our society with which transgender people are often forced to

submit in order to receive services they require to be themselves. Through the DSM IV's

diagnostic criteria for Gender Identity Disorder, the medical community has fictionalized a

normal gender development and contributed to the social and political construction of

transgender identity and behaviours as abnormal. This establishment of transgender as an

illness, not only leads to the potential of regulatory mechanisms imposed on gender-variance,

but also may dangerously separate gender from cultural forces (Spade, 2003). Also, gender-

transgressive individuals who desire body modification paradoxically have to rely on a

diagnosis that is based on normative gender stereotypes with which they may not identify.

Within the structure of our current society, however, many transgender individuals are reliant

on submitting to the process of diagnosis in order to access the basic rights to citizenship that

will allow them to live their daily lives. As Lev (2004) pointed out, "many transgender

people fear removing GID will eliminate any possibility of insurance reimbursement for

treatments relating to gender issues" (p. 178). Furthermore, legislative understandings of

gender diversity are directly tied to these medical perspectives (Hines, 2007). For example, in

order to change one's gender on legal documentation, transgender individuals must have

medical evidence of a sex change. In British Columbia, section 27 of the *Vital Statistics Act*

(1996) requires that, in order for an individual to be able change the gender on their birth

certificate, sie must submit a letter from the physician who performed hir "trans-sexual

surgery" affirming that it was complete by accepted medical standards. Having government

issued ID that has a gender that matches one's presentation often means more to transgender

individuals than just state recognition of their identity. Many rights are, in fact, determined

by whether an individual is able to produce identification that matches their gender. These

rights include being able to use a gendered bathroom without being harassed or arrested, the

right to not be discriminated against in employment, and the right to wear gender appropriate

clothing in institutions such as school and foster care (Spade, 2003). Having one's gender

acknowledged in hospitals, courts and the penal system is also associated with being able to

produce accurate documentation. Not having one's gender accurately acknowledged within

institutions can have grave consequences. The placement of transgender people in penal

institutions that do not match their gender identity, for example, can be not only

disheartening but also extremely dangerous.

While thinking about the transgender population and social work in terms of

oppression is telling, it is also important to acknowledge that transgender people are simply

people and may require services that have nothing to do with the detrimental effects of

oppression based on being trans. For example, trans people, like all people, age and, at some

point, may require services regarding geriatric care. Social workers, therefore, must be

prepared to work with transgender individuals in all fields of service.

Rural and Remote Context

Informed by both culture and geography, the terms 'rural' and 'remote' have been, in

relation to social work practice, complicated for Canadians in the discipline of social work to

define. The terms have come to mean different things within different contexts, and there is

yet to be any universally accepted single definition for either term. The United States, as

Turner (2002) pointed out, has been content with the simple distinction between rural and

urban and has developed a field of rural social work practice that is focused on creating

access for their clients to services available in the cities. Many Canadian social workers have

found that the rural-urban distinction does not explain certain complexities of remote practice

environments, and that urban born practice models do not always fit with the experience of

remote practice. Ingebrigtson and Karpiak (1992) pointed out that remote practice settings

share some elements with rural settings, but also have additional unique qualities such as

distance, isolation, and environmental stressors. Schmidt and Klein (2004) proposed that

working in a northern and remote setting offers a unique set of challenges to social workers

that often requires a specified set of knowledge that goes beyond the breadth of generalist

practice.

For transgender individuals, the sense of living in a hostile environment may be

intensified in rural and remote areas. This may be the result of a local culture that is

dominated by conservative, church driven social and political ideals. These conservative

conceptions are often intolerant of diversity and particularly prejudiced towards visible

gender and sexual diversity. Mancoske (1997) pointed out that communications media in

some rural markets are dominated by conservative political and fundamentalist religious

messages which either prevent the acknowledgment of the existence of queer identities, or

actively present messages of hate towards them. Ingerbrigston and Karpiak (1992) suggested

that remote communities are characterized by a conservative bias and strong pressure to

conform to the norm and, furthermore, that elements such as dress and social life become

public concern. Though, as Halberstam (2005) pointed out, "in the context of a small town

where there are strict codes of normativity, there is also a greater potential for subverting these codes surreptitiously" (p. 44), with potentially transphobic attitudes and the inability to escape the public eye, transgender individuals' safety may be compromised in rural and remote environments.

Rural and remote communities are often characterized by a sense of greater involvement in the community. Comerford, Henson-Stroud, Sionainn, and Wheeler (2004) found that due to the often harsh environmental conditions of rural and remote settings, complete self-reliance is impossible. Consequently, interdependence is a main feature of rural and remote life. Lindhorst (1998) found that a greater sense of involvement in the community could be either positive or negative for queer identifying individuals. On one hand, it can result in more support from the community. On the other hand, it can have the detrimental consequences of being exposed or rejected based on one's transgressive identity.

Lindhorst (1998) proposed that queer identities are often constructed as quintessentially urban identities. This equation of queerness with urban can have impacts on the sense of self of queer individuals who live in rural environments. Halberstam (2005) introduced the concept of meteronormativity to describe the dominant development of queer identification as an urban phenomenon. She proposed that there is a conflation of 'urban' with 'visible' in the normalizing narratives of queer identities. These narratives often tell the tale of the closeted subject who "comes out" in an urban setting where they are allowed, supposedly, a full expression of self in relation to a group of other queer individuals. The physical journey from small town to urban center is, consequently, equated with the psychological journey from closet case to out and proud. Narratives are used to help make sense of life and are often important in developing identity. As Lev (2004) pointed out, it is

often through reading and hearing stories that transgender people come to discover that they are not alone. The privileging of a coming out journey that it is linked with migration to urban environments as *the* transgender narrative can impact remote transgender individuals' sense of self by placing pressure on individuals in rural environments to flee to the city. It may also result in further isolating transgender individuals who are unable or do not want to leave the remote environment.

A report by Vancouver Health Authority's (VHA) Transgender Health Program prepared by Goldberg, Ashbee, Bradd, Lindenberg, & Simpson (2006) acknowledged that there were significant geographical gaps in services for transgender individuals in British Columbia, mentioning specifically that there were no clinical contacts listed in northern regions, and few in other rural or remote locations. For transgender individuals, rural and remote environments can be characterized by intense hostility and a lack of specialized resources. Transgender experiences in rural and remote settings, therefore, should be a topic of great concern for the discipline of social work and addressed within social work education.

Social Work Education

Education is an important element of the profession of social work; it both informs social worker's understanding and guides the discipline's professional practices. The academy is an institution that functions, as Epstein (1999) noted, to "steer the enterprise and mould, guide, and teach the minds" (p. 8). Education is also important because it is directly linked to the production of knowledge. Knowledge, according to Foucault (n.d. as cited in Chambon & Wang, 1999), is a selective representation of reality and is inextricably linked to power and control. Although the Canadian Association of Social Work Education (CASWE; 2011) aims to ensure that social work education offers "equitable educational opportunities

and participation of all member groups and individuals" (Mission Statement section, para.1), the academy can be exclusionary and function (intentionally or unintentionally) as a means of reinforcing the dominant discourse.

At the turn of the century, social work gained much of its legitimization and professional status through the adoption of psychological and biomedical knowledge source (Lundy, 2004). The development of social work theory and practice, therefore, has largely been based on these ways of knowing; ways of knowing that feminist critics have classified as 'malestream' or dominated by a patriarchal epistemology (Barns, 2003). As Barns suggested, "armed with rigid codes of gender-appropriate behaviour, social workers have often sought to regulate and mediate women's interactions with the social, economic, and political world" (p. 149). Through the use of these rigid codes of gender-appropriate behaviour, I would argue that social work also serves to regulate the expression of transgender identity.

Due to the fact that trans specific services are not widely available, access to services for trans people is often dependent on individual attitudes of service providers (Goldberg, et al. 2006; Namaste, 2005). According to Namaste, when individuals are uneducated about trans people, they may refuse access to services based on misinformation or prejudicial attitudes. Although I could not find any studies indicating the rates for transphobia, research has shown that many social work students express homophobic views (Foreman & Quinlan, 2008). The CASW (2005) "Social Work Code of Ethics" states that social workers must be non-discriminatory and competent in the areas in which they provide services. Thus, it is not only of great importance but is also an ethical obligation that social work education trains social workers to be knowledgeable and non-discriminatory about transgender identity.

Furthermore, as O'Neil (1994) stated, "given that social workers can have responsibility for policy and program development, management, training, and community organization as well as clinical intervention, lack of professional education may contribute to systemic discrimination in social services" (p. 8). Given that people that identify as transgender can be clients in any field of social work service, all social workers must be knowledgeable about trans people.

Mallon (2009) found that the professional literature in social work has fallen behind other professional disciplines in acknowledging the legitimacy of transgender identities. In my search, there were significant gaps within the available literature regarding social work education and transgender identity. I was able to find one study by Erich, Bouttè-Queen, Donnelly, and Tittsworth (2007) that examined social work education in relation to working with the transgender community. Collecting responses from 150 licensed social workers in the southern United States who had either BSW or MSW degrees, the study found that in the majority of cases the curricula studied by the respondents did not include information about the transgender community and the respondents felt either "not well" or "not at all" prepared to work with the transgender community. The study's findings also indicated that social work students were more likely to feel confident about working with people from the transgender community if they received educational content on the subject. Erich et al., concluded that the findings of the study strongly suggested:

> educators and students must be exposed to accurate and nonpathologizeing
>
> information about this (the trans) community so as to avoid reinforcing the negative
>
> stereotypes associated with them and to help ameliorate the negative effects of
>
> discrimination through direct and indirect practice models. (pp.50-51)

I could not find any studies that addressed this subject in the Canadian context.

I found no information regarding transgender perceptions of social work education and transgender issues in my literature search. There was no information on the climate of social work education for transgender individuals or transgender perspectives on social work curriculum. O'neil (1994), however, did a study that examined Canadian social work education with regards to same-gender sexual orientation. He found that schools of social work excluded and marginalized issues regarding same-gender orientation and that heterosexism was operating within social work education. He also found that gay male participants felt that schools of social work were discouraging and sometimes unsafe for them. These sentiments were found to be due to passivity on the part of schools of social work in countering heterosexism and lack of social work education policies and programs that actively recognized same-gender orientation as a legitimate expression of human sexuality. As previously discussed, though transgender issues and those of sexual minorities are not synonymous, they do overlap and share some commonality. Although this study is dated and O'neil's findings cannot necessarily be applied to the transgender population, it does give some insight into the nature of social work education.

Although there is an enormous gap in the literature and the findings of the existing literature are bleak, it is important to note, that social work education has a great potential to be a site of resistance and to facilitate positive change. Feminist scholar bell hooks (2003) proposed that "without ongoing movements for social justice in our nation, progressive education becomes all the more important since it may be the only location where individuals can experience support for acquiring a critical consciousness, for any commitment to end domination " (p. 45). It is my belief that social work education can be a meaningful

component in breaking down the systems that oppress gender transgressive individuals. This study aims to begin to fill the gap in the information available on this topic and adds to the overall scholarship in this area.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the category of transgender represents a diverse group of people and, although individual circumstances vary and it is possible for trans people to lead healthy lives, the literature reveals that the transgender population has been marginalized in a number of ways. Social work is a discipline that claims to be dedicated to social justice and mitigating the effects of oppression on marginalized peoples. The conditions of the transgender population, therefore, should be of great concern to the discipline of social work. As social workers may encounter transgender individuals in virtually all fields of service, it is important that they be knowledgeable and non-judgmental in their practice. Social work education guides the discipline's professional practice and, thus, influences social workers' level of competency with regards to the trans population. Presently, however, there is little literature in social work education about the transgender population.

Chapter Three

Part A: Theoretical Framework/Methodology

Conceptualizing Subjectivity

Subjectivity is a complicated concept that has taken on many different meanings in different epistemological paradigms. This research is taking a postmodern feminist approach to subjectivity. For postmodern theorist Michael Foucault, even though individuals constitute themselves in an active fashion, there is no essential 'self' that exists outside of established forms of knowledge; the 'self' is rather an outcome of historical developments, and an effect of discourses (Foucault, Martin, Gutman, & Hutton, 1988). The postmodern feminist approach, however, acknowledges the agency of the subject, and presumes that subjects are both constructed through discursive mechanisms of power and exclusion, and capable of construction, positioning, and critique (Fawcett, 2000). As Moosa-Mitha (2005) proposed, "one's subjectivity, including in one's participation in various social systems, remains a reflection and extension of one's knowledge" (p.59).

In researching subjectivity, participants' experiences and the meanings that they make of their experiences are used to understand their subjectivity, as well as, to deconstruct the dominant representations of participants' realities (Moosa-Mitha, 2005). Conceptualizing research in terms of expressions of subjectivities allows inquiry to encapsulate both the personal and political, and strives to promote a critical consciousness for participants, researchers, and readers. As hooks (1994) suggested,

> we are all subjects of history. We must remain ourselves in a state of embodiment in
>
> order to deconstruct the way power has been traditionally orchestrated in the
>
> classroom, denying subjectivity to some groups and according it to others. By

recognizing subjectivity and the limits of identity, we disrupt the objectification that

is so necessary in a culture of domination (p.139).

Through the expressions of transgender subjectivities, this research aims to destabilize the

dominant discourse that oppresses gender variant individuals. As Grace, Hill, Johnson, and

Lewis (2004) suggested, "otherly gendered people and sexual outlaws live, work and play in

spaces disciplined by heteronormative discourse" (p. 308). The expression of queer

subjectivities, therefore, is disruptive by nature.

This research explores transgender subjectivities (plural) rather than a single

transgender subjectivity. In doing so, this inquiry aims to highlight the plurality of

transgender experiences, and to acknowledge the multiple locations that individuals exist

within.

Queer Methodology

Methodologies are meant to link epistemological positions with the tangible methods

used. I identify as queer and am engaging in a process of inquiry that seeks to elicit

transgender perspectives on social work education. My research, therefore, will be informed

by queer methodologies; in other terms, my methodological choices will be informed by

queer theory. In general, queer theory, informed by poststructural and postmodern ontology,

aims to understand the ways in which normalizing practices and processes deny and erase

queer subjectivities. Within a queer theory paradigm, research methods are used strategically

as a means of understanding and producing resistance to structures of domination concerning

sexual and gender normalization (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

It is important to point out that, although I will be using a queer framework in order to

achieve specific methodological ends, 'queer' as a theoretical approach is slippery, hard to

define and refuses to be complete (Grace et al., 2004; Plummer, 2005; Browne & Nash, 2010). Plummer (2005) declared, "queer theory must explicitly challenge any kind of closure or settlement, so any attempts at definition or codification must be nonstarters" (p. 365). Browne and Nash (2010) asserted that defining and codifying the term queer must not be achieved because then the term's usage would be limited to the understandings derived from the definition. It is, therefore, up to each author employing queer methodologies to define what 'queer' means in the context of their research.

In the context of my research, queer will be used as a means of challenging traditional knowledge production. A central focus of much queer methodology is that it is concerned with the politics of knowledge production; it strives to be transgressive and transformative and, by highlighting the instability of meanings that are taken-for-granted and the power relations that result, challenges knowledge production that claims to be universal (Browne & Nash, 2010). Queer theory, therefore, assumes that knowledge is incomplete and that meanings must be constantly reinterpreted and re-evaluated (Grace, et al. (2004).

Queer methodologies challenge the capacity of traditional/conventional research practices to examine subjectivities and social lives that are messy and unstable. Queer theory increasingly embraces the concept that there is not simply a single social world to be uncovered, but rather a multiplicity of overlapping social worlds that operate in different ways on several scales (Beck, 2000 as cited in Browne and Nash, 2010). For Herising (2005), research informed by queer theory has a politic of opposition and aims to "consider what is outside the norm of research, and to interrogate the trajectories of power and knowledge in using the margins to define multiple central locations" (p. 141). In order to achieve this, Browne and Nash (2010) proposed that strategies of data collection "must include various

forms of observation, visual materials and engagements with auto-ethnography as well as exploring the intersections of humanities and social sciences through art and textual analysis" (p. 14). Although textual analyses are not within the scope of this current research, I do aim to employ a variety of diverse methods.

Queer methodologies also have the potential to radically disrupt the relationship between the research and researched. Detamore (2010) suggests that we must move beyond the goal of emancipating subjugated voices and strive towards a relationship that more closely resembles kinship. Furthermore, the traditionally assumed outcomes of research are challenged by queer methodologies. Queer methodologies acknowledge that the research process results in changing the researcher's perspective as much as it creates knowledge or impacts participants.

Queer theory has been critiqued for being focused on theory and disengaged with the material realities and lived experiences of transgender individuals (Browne &Nash, 2010; Monro, 2007). This research strives to bridge the gap by concurrently embracing a queer fluidity that disrupts the dominant discourse while attending to the material realities of the participants. This will be achieved by employing arts-based research methods that account for partial, situated, knowledge coupled with semi-structured interviews that hone in on specific experiences within social work education.

Arts-Based Research Practice

Arts-based research practices are a set of methodological tools that can be used in all phases of qualitative research. These research methods can work towards both disrupting traditional research and expanding the ideal goals of qualitative research. Arts-based research practices serve to expand the qualitative research paradigm by providing qualitative

researchers with a "broader palette of investigative and communication tools with which to garner and relay a range of social meanings" (Leavy, p.11). For the purpose of this research, I will be using arts-based research practices during data collection, analysis, and (re)presentation and will, therefore, talk about the value of arts-based research practices in all of these areas.

In line with the objectives of queer methodologies, arts-based research practices work towards disrupting traditional research paradigms (Leavy, 2009). In research that strives to destabilize oppressive hegemonic discourses, such as this, it is fundamental to disrupt dominant traditions of research. One of the most basic aspects of arts-based research is that it is aimed at the enhancement of perspective rather than uncovering certainty (Barone and Eisner, 2006). Traditionally social science research, including qualitative methods, has been influenced by positivism and based on an understanding that social phenomena are static, predictable, and recordable; however, as a result of the influence of postmodernism, certain veins of qualitative research have shifted dramatically over the past decade and see knowledge as something that must be understood to be in constant movement (Foster, 2007). With this in mind, this research will use arts-based research practices to work towards accounting for a plurality of voices as well as defying the production of knowledge that is constructed as objective, that privileges certain ways of knowing over others, and that reifies power relations. As part of distancing themselves from traditional research, arts-based researchers have made great effort to establish a unique sets of standards by which the quality of their work is measured. According to Cole and Knowles (2008), standards include whether the research has a clear intellectual and moral purpose, whether the researcher's

voice is evident, whether the research is communicable and accessible, and whether the research has theoretical and transformative potential.

Through the creative expressions of the participants and the researcher, arts-based research practice has the profound potential to resist hegemonic discourses in a number of different ways. Participants, researchers, and readers engaged with artistic processes and products are challenged to see things from a different perspective. Weber (2008) declared, "images can enhance empathetic understanding and generalizability. Images literally help us to adopt someone else's gaze, see someone else's point of view, and borrow their experience for a moment" (p. 45). Art can assist us to discover, illuminate, and present ideas, feelings, and phenomena that might otherwise remain untouched (Leavy, 2009). In addition, as Gray and Webb (2008) proposed, "the art's work does not only 'open up' in disclosing a radical alterity, or making visible that which has been previously closed down or excluded, but it also endures as a new narrative " (p.193). Given that this research aims to destabilize the dominant discourses that oppress gender variant individuals and to initiate a dialogue about how to increase awareness and acceptance of gender diversity within the discipline of social work, these elements of arts-based research practices have great potential to contribute to goals of this research.

In accordance with queer methodologies, arts-based research practices challenge the conventional research-participant relationships and the researcher's position within the research. Due to the engaged nature of arts-based practices, the researcher, along with the participants, often partakes in an embodied experience which inherently challenges the traditional subject-object research relationship (Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis, & Grauer, 2006). The inclusion of arts-based practices in the analysis and representation phases of

research leads the researcher to a greater understanding of self within research (Foster, 2007). The use of arts-based practices in research, therefore, accommodates researcher reflexivity and exposes the ways in which knowledge is a re-presentation of the meanings that have been co-created by participants and the researcher rather than an absolute reflection of participants' realities. Based on the queer, postmodern epistemological foundation of this research, an unbiased presentation of research is considered problematic; therefore, I will strive to actively put my voice forward through both art and writing.

Arts-based research practices are extremely conducive to this project given that the main goal of this research is to elicit transgender experiences. Leavy (2009) noted that arts-based practices are particularly useful for research that deals with identity because it has the ability to promote a highly engaged dialogue that stems from emotional elements of social life as well as being able to effectively access multiple meanings. The use of arts-based research practices disrupts the monopoly of the written word and can allow participants to express thoughts and feelings that may not be easily put to words. Employing arts-based methods in the (re)presentation of research has the potential to dislodge dominant stereotypes and accommodates for multiple interpretations while the use of arts-based practices in data collection has the potential to furnish participants with the necessary tools and inspiration to continue working through challenging experiences and problematizing the dominant discourse. Gunaratnam (2007) proposed that art emerges from the interplay between the internal and external and can, therefore, demand invention and representation as well as create surprise. As Chambon (2009) elegantly stated, "like a churning of the stomach, art turns the implicit over into forms of explicit, layering reality until it blurs what we know. Art works through social imaginaries and can be perceived as extended political imagination" (p.

220). Being able to blur reality and express multiple meanings is another way in which arts-based research practices support queer methodologies.

Finally, there is congruence between the goals of my research and arts-based research practices as the arts have been consistently employed on a grassroots level by social movements as a site of resistance to oppression. Leavy (2009) declared, "the resistive potential of art is now being harnessed by social researchers increasingly committed to dismantling stereotypes, accessing voices of marginalized groups, and engaging in research that propels social change" (p. 255). By giving participants the opportunity to reflect on what their experiences in social work education means to them arts-based research practices promote a critical consciousness for participants, as well as, for researchers and readers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research is conceptualized in terms of eliciting expressions of subjectivities where participants' experiences and the meanings that they make of their experiences are used to understand their positions and to deconstruct the dominant representations of their realities. The study will be guided by both queer and arts-based research methodologies. These two methodological frameworks complement both each other and the research's goals.

Chapter Three

Part B: Process of Inquiry Methods

Sampling and Recruitment. A purposive word of mouth snowball sampling method was used for this inquiry. A purposive sample is one where participants are deliberately selected based on the fact that they possess certain characteristics (Koerber & McMichael, 2008). A purposive sampling method made sense for this project because it allowed me to access the experiences of a specific group of people. Participants were chosen based on the conditions that they self-identify as transgender or gender variant and had, at some point in the past 10 years, studied in a social work program, at either the BSW, MSW or PHD level, at an accredited university. Participants were not required to have completed their degree at the time of participation in the study. I acknowledge that much can change in a ten year period and that I ran the risk of introducing a temporal bias by having chosen such broad criteria; however, this time frame was chosen because my target population is limited and I wanted to increase the likelihood of obtaining participants. In addition, this inquiry does not aim to be a rigorous critique of the current state of academic institutions, but rather aspires to gain perspectives about transgender experiences. As it turned out, the longest period of time that a participant had been out of social work school was three years. Specific academic institutions were not targeted in this study but I sought participants who attended Canadian universities. In case I did not gain adequate participation, I kept the possibility of opening up the study to those who attended schools in the United States of America, but was grateful to gain enough participants who had studied or were studying at Canadian universities.

With my research goals and methods in mind, I sought out a small sample size, between three and ten participants. I had five participants. As Crouch and MaKenzie (2006)

argued, the best way to conduct studies that are exploratory in nature is through working with small 'samples'. Having a small sample allowed for more in-depth data collection and afforded me adequate time to tend to the developing themes and work with authethnographic materials.

As the intention of this research was to gain insights that are partial and situated and not prove a theory that is absolute, the concept of data saturation, where research continues until no new relevant material emerges, was not applicable. Although saturation was not an objective, I did ensure that my sample and data collection produced sufficient materials to achieve the goals of my research.

After gaining a letter of approval from UNBC Ethics Review Board (Appendix A) I advertised the project by electronically sending a letter and poster (Appendices B & C respectively) to pertinent individuals and organizations across Canada. I sent word of the project to Canadian schools of social work, university Pride organizations, transgender support groups, key individuals who are involved in the transgender community, and personal contacts who I thought may know someone who fit the criteria of the research. I also put the advertisement on relevant list-serves such as trans-academics and TAS-discussion. Those interested in the project were invited to contact me directly via e-mail or phone. From these advertisement efforts I received responses from potential participants as well as supportive sentiments from a number of individuals who did not meet participation criteria. This supportive response to the advertisement of this project was reassuring and affirmed that this project was valuable.

Individuals who fit the aforementioned criteria and expressed interest in participating were first sent an electronic copy of the Project Information Sheet (Appendix D) and invited

to contact me to further discuss the possibility of participation. This introductory

conversation allowed both the potential participant and me to decide whether participation in

the project would be beneficial. This initial conversation gave participants a chance to ask

questions about my location within the trans community and my intentions for this work.

Once an individual agreed to be a participant, sie was mailed a package that contained a hard

copy of the Project Information Sheet, two informed consent forms (one for them to keep and

one to return to the researcher), and an art activity booklet. Participants also received

postage-paid envelopes with my return address for both the informed consent sheet and the

art booklet.

Visual arts-based inquiry. As someone who has studied visual arts at university and

has experience with various visual arts-based media, I chose to focus on visual arts research

practices in data collection, analysis and (re)presentation. I also chose this because, given the

great distance between myself and the participants, it was the most logistically feasible arts-

based research practice with which to engage. Visual arts inquiry furthermore fits particularly

well within my research principles. Creating visual images can be a particularly effective

way for participants to explore subjectivity. Visual images provide a way to connect with,

represent, and give meaning to inner experiences (Jongeward, 2009). Additionally, visual

inquiry is apt for addressing individuals' experiences of gender variance. Rollings (2009)

proposed that constructed narratives dictate what is 'socially visible' and that meaning and

experience are embedded in a visual context; in this process, certain bodies are masked from

normativity and made invisible. Eliciting visually descriptive data can give participants the

opportunity to respond with their own transgressive materials to a constructed visual context

in which they are either not present or misrepresented.

In order to use visual arts-based practices as a means of data collection, I mailed

participants an activity book that directed them through their creative work. Within the

activity book there were six activities coupled with six spaces to reflect on the activities. The

six activities were as follows:

1. Consider how your gender has informed your experiences studying social work
2. Consider the challenges you have faced while studying social work
3. Consider the ways in which you felt supported while studying social work
4. Consider the ways in which you think trans experiences differ between urban/rural settings
5. Using your imagination consider what you **hope** social work education looks like in the future
6. Explore a theme of your choosing that relates to your experiences in social work

The visual media used to explore the activities were left up to the participants to

decide. Above each activity, however, participants were reminded of some of the different

media that they could engage with:

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* Draw * Print * Collage * Photograph * Sculpt * Mixed Media * Print
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In addition on each activity page participants were encouraged to freely express themselves

with the statement: "**Remember**: All expressions are encouraged —do what feels most

comfortable and creative for you!"

For the purpose of this project, the visual data were primarily approached in terms of

the meanings that they created for the participants. It was emphasized to the participants that

the visual data would not be analyzed or critiqued based on conventional aesthetic standards.

As Cutcher (2007) noted, "the purposes of art are so varied and complex, there isn't, nor

should there be, a singular definition of what art is, or what it isn't" (p. 80). Any analysis of

the visual data did not occur until after the semi-structured interview occurred. Consequently,

participants had the chance to reflect on their creative process and the intended meanings of

their artwork before any data was analyzed. Jenkings, Woodward, and Winter (2008)

suggested that, in research that uses visual inquiry, participants are not only data resources

but are also resources of analysis. Through the process of reflecting on their art, respondents

contributed to the analysis of their own visual data.

Semi-structured interviews. Following the art-making, participants were invited to

participate in a ninety minute semi-structured interview. As Leavy (2009) suggested, doing a

verbal follow-up after the creative processes can be an "empowering experience for the

research participants where they retain control, share their experience, and have their feelings

and perspectives taken seriously (which is a form of validation)" (p. 229). The semi-

structured interviews aimed to give participants a chance to reflect on their visual data, as

well as, to articulate their perspectives on the topic as a whole. The following questions were

used as a guide:

1. What social work program or programs have you participated in? When?
2. How would you currently describe your gender identity?
3. When I make reference to you in my thesis, how would you like to be referred to in this project? Would you like to choose a psydonym? What pronoun would you like me to use?
4. What are some things that motivated you to study social work?
5. What other aspects of your identity do you feel have intersected with your gender to impact your experiences?
6. How has social work compared to other things that you've studied/other experiences that you've had?
7. Were there other self-identified transgender individuals in your program? How did this impact you?
8. What role did you play, if any, in education about the transgender community in class discussion? How did this make you feel?
9. What things do you want social work educators to consider when they talk about gender?
10. What aspects of your social work program addressed transgender experiences?
11. What transgender content do you think is important to include in social work education?
12. What challenges did you experience during your social work education?

13. How did you feel supported as an individual during your social work education?

In order for both the participant and me to be able to see the artwork during the interview, after exploring other video conferencing possibilities, the interviews were conducted using Skype video chat and recorded using 'Callrecorder' software. Once the interviews were complete, the participants were requested to mail their creative work to me. After all of the interviews were complete, I re-watched and personally transcribed the interviews.

Using the internet to conduct video interviews was necessary given the geographical distance between participants and me. To a certain extent, video chat allowed me to access certain qualities of an in person interview such as being able to observe facial expressions and body language, and probe for clarification. It also allowed for participants to see me and for us to be able to build rapport. Although, given the circumstances, I believe this interview format was the best option, it was not equivalent to an in person interview and had some limitations. In spite of the fact that I felt the interviews were largely successful there were some technical difficulties that impacted the interview process. In one interview, there was some audio interference that occasionally required the participant to repeat hirself; this slightly disrupted the flow of the interview. In another interview, no video chat was available which limited the conversation that occurred surrounding the creative work of that participant.

Autoethnography. Autoethnography is the process by which researchers, as an element of inquiry, weave their own experience into a coherent narrative for distribution to the reader/audience (Leavy, 2009). As a person who has an intimate and situated connection with the topic of this inquiry, I have chosen to include autoethnography as a final method.

Within the context of my research, it is my hope that the telling of my own story will function not only as a piece of data, but also as a means of further accounting for my subjectivity as an inquirer and breaking down the divide between the 'researcher' and 'researched'. Through articulating my voice to those who consume my work, I hope to share, rather than hide, my relationship with the research. Although through the use of autoethnography I hope gain a better understanding of myself and my position within the research, as Chang (2008) pointed out, "authoethnography is not about focusing on the self alone, but about searching for understanding of others (culture/society) through the self" (p. 49). Through this process I hope to be able to merge my scholar-self with my artistic self and employ various visual art media in the creation of an autoethnography (Scott-Hoy & Ellis, 2008). Autoethnographic data will be interspersed among the rest of the data throughout this document.

Confidentiality of Personal Information and Security of Data

Measures were taken to ensure participants' confidentiality and anonymity. I was the only person to have access to any identifying information about participants. The principles and limits of confidentiality were explained to participants verbally as well as outlined in the letter of informed consent. With regards to anonymity, at the beginning of the study, participants were asked whether or not they would like to choose a pseudonym. The choice of whether or not to use a pseudonym was given in order to respect both anonymity as well as the desire to be given credit for their contributions. Given the personal and sensitive nature of the subject, extra consideration was given to anonymity and any information that was potentially identifying was left out. All visual and interview data was labeled with the initials

of the chosen name and kept separate from any identifying information (such as participants

consent forms).

All data was stored in a locked cabinet that was kept in my locked office at UNBC.

All sound files and transcripts were saved on a computer that was password protected. Once

this project is finished, all data will be either returned to the participant (upon their request)

or destroyed one year after collection.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis. The semi structured interviews, visual data, and some pieces of

the autoethnographic information were analyzed using thematic analysis. As Braun and

Clarke (2006) put it, "through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible

and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex

account of data" (p.78).Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke, is a method

where patterns in the data are actively identified, selected, and reported by the researcher.

Boyatzis (1998) proposed that there are three different ways of developing thematic

code: theory driven, prior data or prior research driven, and inductive or data driven. These

different approaches to coding can be thought to form a continuum spanning from theory to

raw data. Although theory and prior research have undoubtedly impacted the questions which

the raw data for this project is a derivative, as well as my perspective going into the coding

process, I have chosen to conceptually adopt a largely inductive approach to coding where

the features of the raw data drive the identification of themes and the development of codes.

Developing codes from the data vs theory is congruent with this project because the topic has

not been widely studied. It also allows for the entire data set to be explored and for

unexpected insights to become relevant. Boyatzis (1998) stated that "with a complete view of

the information available, the researcher can appreciate gross (i.e. easily evident) and intricate (i.e. difficult-to-discern) aspects of the information" (p. 30).

It is important to make clear that adopting an approach to coding and theme identification that is data driven does not imply that the themes themselves simply reside or are hidden in the data waiting to be discovered. The themes and codes that developed were actively constructed from the data, not passively unearthed. This is not meant to downplay the contribution of the participants and the influence of their perspectives but rather to highlight the role that I have played in selecting, editing, and deploying specific pieces of narrative evidence to contribute to the goals of my research (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Themes, therefore, do not simply 'emerge' from the data but are rather a reflection of the links that I, as a researcher, have made based on my thoughts about the data.

For the purpose of this research, I followed the five phases of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). These phases include: familiarizing myself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Though the systematic process of thematic analysis put forward by Braun and Clarke was followed, in sticking with the epistemological foundation of arts-based and queer methodologies, this process did not solely rely on rational modes of thinking. The construction of themes was a subjective experience for me that included rationality as well as creativity. Margolin (2009) referred to this intuitive process as "befriending" one's data (p.61).

Visual Response analysis. Although the participants' reflections on their own creative work remained paramount, the aesthetic or emotional response that their work evoked in me, the researcher, cannot be separated from the process of analysis. Weber (2008) commented,

"as norms and expectations for communicating research results change, a growing number of scholars are turning to image-based modes of representation, *creating art* to express their findings and theories" (p. 49). Denzin and Lincoln (2008) maintained, the subjective practice of interpreting one's data is both inherently artistic and political. By engaging in creative arts-based practices in analysis, the researcher can come to a better understanding of themselves and their experiences both in general and, more importantly, within the context of the research (Foster, 2007). Researchers who use creative arts process during analysis are explicitly challenged to acknowledge and disclose the ways in which they use intuition and creativity in their research. The process of acknowledgement and disclosure helps to mediate issues of representation by making clear the influence of the researcher's voice. After both the visual and interview data were collected, beyond thematic analysis, I responded to the information with my own visual art.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a purposive sampling method was used where subjects were selected across Canada based on their self-identification as transgender and their attendance at a school of social work within the past ten years. The project employed visual arts-based practices as a method for gathering, analyzing and (re)presenting data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted once participants finished creating the art and thematic and visual response analysis was used to analyze the interview data and pieces of the autoethnographic data.

Chapter Four: Research Findings

Participants

I enlisted five participants from across Canada who self-identified as trans and had studied at schools of social work in the past ten years. For the purposes of the thesis and to maintain their anonymity, I will refer to these participants as Jordan, Zoe, Corey, Carter, and Elijah. When speaking directly about these participants' experiences I will use pronouns that reflect their identity. When I am concerned about attaching a participant's experience to an individual, for the purposes of anonymity I will not name the participant and will use a gender neutral pronoun. In the sample, a diversity of levels of study was expressed. Zoe, Elijah, and Corey studied social work at an undergraduate level, while Jordan and Carter studied at the graduate level. Zoe, Elijah, and Carter were engaged in the process of studying social work at the time of the interview, while Corey and Jordan had graduated from their programs no longer than three years ago. In addition to specifically studying social work, two participants, Zoe and Corey, had participated in human service diploma programs prior to going to social work school. Further, at the time of the project, Corey had just graduated from a post-degree professional counselling program.

Beyond a diversity of levels of education, the sample also represented experiences from a diversity of geographical locations. In order to protect the anonymity of the participants, the specific locations of the schools of study will not be divulged; however, I will mention that the participants' experiences were situated in locations that not only characterized different parts of Canada, but also different sizes of universities and cities. The diversity of the geographical locations expressed in the project was expanded by the fact that three of the participants shared experiences studying either social work or human services in

more than one location. Participants expressed experiences studying in rural towns, small cities and major urban centers.

Each participant expressed a number of identities that intersected with hir gender to inform their experiences. In order to respect anonymity, I will not outline specifically what each person conveyed with regards to intersecting identities. From the sample as a whole, some of the things that participants highlighted as intersecting with their gender identity and their experience studying social work were class/poverty, sexual identity, being a parent, being an immigrant, spirituality, ability/(dis)ability, education, sobriety/history of addiction, and whiteness. Class/poverty, ability/(dis)ability, and whiteness were intersecting identities that were mentioned by many of the participants. Sexual orientation was also expressed by many participants as a site of intersection. Sexual orientation had a unique connection with gender identity for participants who mentioned this intersection. Sexual orientation not only interacted alongside gender identity to impact experiences, but was also sometimes informed by gender identity. One participant recounted that "at one point I viewed myself as bi-curious but as my gender evolved, that label no longer worked for me". Several participants also talked about how, outside of being trans, other elements of gender influenced their experiences. One participant articulated that his past experiences as a queer woman influences his position, in particular with regards to the feminist lens that he brings to life. Another participant emphasized that the male privilege that he gained after transitioning impacted him. A third participant mentioned that being a woman influences her standpoint and that sexism and misogyny impacts her experiences. Interestingly, some of the intersecting elements expressed by participants were points of social location based on

characteristics, such as (dis)ability, while others, such as spirituality, reflected their belief system.

These intersections highlight the fact that each participant has a unique perspective and that being trans is not the only thing that influences a person's experience. Although the diversity of the sample adds strength to the project by allowing the project to cover more ground, it also reminds us that the knowledge that has been produced by this project is nuanced and situated within these diverse experiences.

A diversity of identities under the trans umbrella was also expressed in the sample. Jordan, Elijah and Carter all conveyed a masculine gender identity. Jordan mentioned that he identifies as a "trans-masculine creature", while Elijah said that, though he identifies as a female to male transgender person, in the 'outside world' he simply identifies as male. Similarly, Carter mentioned that to most people he is male and that, although being trans is important to him and not something that he keeps secret, in some environments he does not advertise it. Zoe expressed her gender identity as 'female' and 'female transsexual' but mentioned that she liked the term 'trans' best because she feels that it is simpler and more encompassing. Corey expressed hir gender identity as something that is constantly evolving and mentioned having a "trans experience that's not within the male or female form".

Presentation of results

The findings reported in this section include narrative information from the semi-structured interviews, auto-ethnographic writing, and pieces of visual data gathered from both participants and myself. The different types of data will be presented together based on the themes that were constructed during data analysis.

As Butler-Kisber (2008) proposed "using images in a final representational product can enhance understanding, show emotion, open avenues for contemplation and discussion, and contribute to persuasiveness" (p. 269). Consequently, I have chosen to present a selection of the visual data as part of my findings. Within an academic structure that treats ambiguity as invalid, the artists' response to the images has been included to add context and legitimacy to the visual data. Each piece of art that is included, however, will be presented on a page by itself so that the viewer can engage with the image on hir own terms before hearing the creator's statement about the piece. Artistic representations of experiences may entice viewers to see phenomena from a different position. The reader/viewer is encouraged to pause on each imagine before moving onto the artist's explanation.

The themes that I choose functioned as a means of organizing the data. It is important to note that this organization scheme is not all encompassing and does not always encapsulate the subtle, overlapping, complicated, elements of the data. The following themes and sub themes will be discussed in the coming pages:

1. Reasons for entering social work

2. Personal Impact
   - Only trans person
   - Role as educator
   - Others' perceptions
   - Passing, and Being 'out'

3. Ways of coping with difficulties
   - Connection with others outside of social work
   - Connection to those within social work
   - Supportive ideas/activities

4. Reflections on the program
   - Trans resources at universities
   - Existing social work environment
   - Program's approach to trans issues

5. Ways to Improve Social Work
   - Openness
   - Dialogue
   - Intersectional approach
   - Gender theory
   - Experiential

6. Difference between urban and rural

7. Experiences Doing Art

Themes

Reasons for Entering Social Work

After examining the data, I found that participants' choice to pursue studying social work was influenced by their perceptions of what social work entailed, coupled with a variety of impacting life experiences. Though each participant's reason for entering social work school was slightly different, the desire to be able to effect some sort of positive change was a driving force that was expressed by all participants. For example, Zoe commented:

initially [going into social work] was mostly about picking a job that I could go to sleep at night and not feel like I was contributing to a system that I felt was corrupt and wrong but then I thought 'wow, I could really help some people out'.

Participants' aspirations to effect change ranged from the desire to help individuals, to the drive to transform structures of inequity.

For some participants, involvement in radical communities impacted their decision to enter the field. Jordan and Elijah both talked explicitly about the fact that their experience as activists influenced their decision to study social work. For Elijah, entering a social work degree program provided the opportunity to effect change within the system while still working outside of it by engaging with radical "anarchist" communities. Jordan entered social work with a hope that he would garner skills around social organizing and gain a

working knowledge of the social services structures in his city. He declared, "I was doing a lot of activism and I wanted some more practical skills around how to do that sustainably". Carter also came to social work through an involvement in community action. He recounted that he was doing a lot of volunteer work in his community and found himself surrounded by social workers who effectively 'recruited' him by suggesting "you should become a social worker, this [work that you're doing] is what we do and then you'd be able to get paid".

Personal experiences influenced some participants' decisions to enter social work. Interacting with social service organizations and encountering both positive and negative aspects of these services played a role in participants' relationship to the discipline of social work. Elijah stated that having both positive and negative interactions with social work agencies in his own life, both as a child in the foster care system and as an adult accessing supports, impacted his interests and motivated him to want to work towards effecting change within the social work field. Corey reflected on the fact that she grew up in a household where her parents took in foster children. She remarked that it "was a huge experience growing up and wanting to be one of the 'good' social workers versus the 'crappy' ones". Corey's experience of having a learning disability also put her in a position where she personally felt the effects of being inside a structure that did not work for her. From this experience she became interested in going into something in which she could "transform things".

My own story. Like many of the other participants, I entered social work with a desire to impact change and a strong commitment to a variety of activist pursuits including community accessibility, environmental action, and social justice campaigns. I entered the human service field through an interest in art therapy. I decided to specifically pursue social

work over art therapy, however, because of the discipline's structural analysis. I was attracted to the potential that the discipline presented with regards to doing work that examined and challenged systemic oppression.

Personal Impacts

Though participants' circumstances and feelings varied greatly, looking at the personal impacts of being trans while studying social work gives us insight into trans experiences within the discipline. Being the only trans person in the program, responsibility for being an educator, others' perceptions of trans people, and 'passing' and being 'out' were some common elements of participants' experiences that impacted them personally. Although these themes were not the only ones that evoked personal responses, they felt the most significant to me.

Only trans person. All of the participants, save one, conveyed that they were the only trans identified person in their program. Furthermore, in several of these cases, participants expressed being in a situation where they were, to their knowledge, the only trans people in their whole school. This impacted participants in a variety of ways. For some, being the only trans person had a negative impact. Three of the participants, who had the experience of being the only trans person in their program, mentioned that this made them feel "alone" and "isolated". A sense of rejection and/or fears of rejection were also voiced in relation to being the only trans student. The size of the campus and the city in which the campus was housed were mentioned as factors that both contributed to and impacted these participants' experience. Being the only trans person at a small campus and in a small city was considered to be "especially hard".

Elijah described being the only trans person at school as "alienating" and mentioned that, because no one at his school could understand what he was going through, none of the resources or supports available were "positive" for him or made him "feel more connected". Furthermore, he felt that being the only trans person at his school impacted the ways in which the school dealt with trans related issues and the attention (or lack of attention) that these issues received. He explained that he believes that his school has been reluctant to address trans issues because they consider him to be the only person affected by these issues. The effects of being the only trans person in an environment that does not feel supportive of trans identities can be devastating. Reflecting on being in this position, Elijah recounted that "the first six months (of school) were one sort of really difficult climb to a nervous breakdown".

For one participant, a sense of futility resulted from the lack of trans voices in social work. For the creative activity that invited participants to consider how their gender informed their experiences studying social work, Carter drew a constellation and revealed that he felt that, although gender really informed his experience, he did not feel it informed the experiences of anyone else around him. Carter stated, "I'm one star burning very brightly but then what difference does it make? You can't even really see it, you get lost in the rest of everything else".

Based on being the only trans persons in their programs and struggling with elements of this experience, both Zoe and Elijah expressed a hope for more trans people to enter the field of social work. Elijah mentioned that he has been trying to "recruit" and Zoe articulated that because she felt like she "was the only voice" in her classes and was "fighting [her] own battle" she hoped "in the future that more trans people step up to the plate".

Although the impact of being the only trans person in social work school has the potential to be extremely challenging for trans individuals, this was not necessarily true in all cases. Being the only trans person at her school and in her program had a different impact on Corey. She did not speak of this experience in terms of isolation, rejection or feeling alone, but rather expressed that being the only trans person was part of the 'uniqueness' of her experience.

Jordan was the only participant whose social work program had another trans identified student. Jordan's experience with this was counter to what some of the other participants seemed to have hoped for in having other trans people in their programs. For Jordan, the experience of having another trans person in his program did not greatly impact his experience. Jordan explained:

> I think that there was an assumed sort of solidarity. Like I introduced myself, I found
>
> myself in groups with them but of course being trans did not actually align us. He was
>
> not on the same page as me with a lot of stuff. It was a sort of a short lived union.

Though Carter did not have another student in his program, he also expressed his doubt that having another single trans person in his program would have made a great difference.

Role as educator. One of the consequences of being either the only, or one of the few, trans people in schools of social work was that participants often encountered situations where they took on the role as educator with regards to trans issues. All of the participants voiced that they found themselves in circumstances where, to varying degrees, they educated others about trans issues. Most participants found themselves in situations where education about trans issues was necessary not only for fellow students, but also for the faculty and administration.

For Jordan, the reason for bringing trans issues to the fore in school was twofold. Jordan reflected, "I definitely found myself talking about trans stuff; one, because sometimes that's where my interests lie, and also sometimes there was an absence of knowledge". A lack of knowledge about trans issues in classes was something that all participants had experienced at some point in their education. During the interview, many participants shared specific experiences in which lack of knowledge or inaccurate knowledge about trans issues prompted them to step in. For example, one participant recounted an experience where his professor conflated gender identity with sexual orientation in the context of human development. In this circumstance, the professor singled out the student and stated, "you should talk about this because I don't know anything about it". This participant felt pressured and frustrated by being put on the spot.

Fielding questions was one way in which some of the participants educated others about trans issues. Corey mentioned that she was "always open to questions, as long as they were not ignorant or anything" and pointed out that, "of course, we all define that differently". Being open to answering questions was sometimes difficult for participants, as some of the questions that were asked were inappropriate or offensive. For example, Elijah recounted that "someone asked [him] to draw a diagram of [his] body". Another participant struggled to confront a question that challenged the necessity of transition. Having to face these disrespectful types of questions evoked negative feelings such as anger and distress for participants.

Another way in which participants contributed to educating about trans issues was through workshops and lectures. Three of the participants made reference to the fact that they had experience facilitating gender related workshops in a variety of different environments

outside of their schools. More than one participant had the experience of being invited within their schools to lecture or give workshops about trans issues.

Many of the participants expressed mixed feelings about being in a position where they had to take on the role of educator. For example, Elijah shared that "being open to dialogue with people about my gender identity has been a bit of a dichotomy for me because on the one hand, I don't want to talk about it and on the other hand, I have to". He mentioned that although others acknowledged that he shouldn't always have to bear the responsibility of being the educator, there was no one other than him to do it. He said that he felt like he was "grasping at straws".

In some circumstances, participants did not even feel comfortable to speak about trans issues in their classes, or did not feel school of social work was a safe space to bring this up. After recounting a situation in which Eiljah was specifically asked to do an educational piece about trans issues, he remarked "it's not appropriate for them to have asked me to be that vulnerable with students who I did not trust yet". Although Carter is extremely dedicated to educating others about trans issues, and has done so in many different capacities, he mentioned that "in my classes I did not feel responsible (to educate), I just did not feel safe. I did not say anything".

Others' perceptions. Others' perceptions of trans people in general as well as others' specific perceptions of participants greatly impacted participants' experiences in schools of social work. Participants shared experiences where others' perceptions impacted their sense of self and their sense of belonging in social work school. In some cases, others' perceptions contributed to the creation of an environment that was not affirming of trans identities.

Transphobic attitudes and behaviours devalue trans people and their experiences. Elijah recounted a transphobic experience that impacted him:

> I remember when I was talking to somebody outside and this one student said to me 'I work with a boy who is trans' and I said 'oh, so he's going from female to male'. 'No, he thinks he's a girl, his name was Graham but now he calls himself Amy and I call him Gramy as a joke because he does not look anything like a girl'.

Though the student's judgment was not directed directly at Elijah, he was extremely offended by this.

Participants documented situations in which others specifically passed critical judgment about, or discredited their gender identity. Two participants, Zoe and Elijah, talked about having their gender identity disrespected by being misgendered or called by the wrong pronoun. Elijah recounted:

> I did have one professor who was just really blatantly rude to me a lot of the time and consistently used the wrong pronouns and refused to call me 'he' until [according to her] I 'grew a mustache', because [to her] I don't look like a man.

This professor's "hostility" towards Elijah and his gender identity made him feel unwelcome in class and often resulted in him leaving or missing classes. Elijah professed, "you know, I can't be called by the wrong pronoun everyday". Although I acknowledge that pronoun slip-ups happen, in my experience, being consistently misgendered is an incredibly invalidating experience that discredits a trans person's position within the gender category. Zoe reported, "when people would misgender me and would use my old name and pronouns while I was transitioning at school, it was very challenging for me". Being in a position where one's

gender identity is disregarded does not constitute a comfortable environment of learning and growth for trans people.

Carter also expressed an experience with a teacher that he felt was transphobic and drew his gender presentation into question. During a class in which Carter was not 'out', one of his teachers promoted some theories that reified certain sex role stereotypes and reinforced gender norms. The teacher suggested that certain mannerisms were essentially different between the sexes and that they couldn't effectively be portrayed by someone who does not belong to that sex. After that, Carter was concerned with the aspect of his gender expression that was discussed by the professor and felt as though the discussion in class was an "underhanded" way for the professor to tell Carter that his trans status was known. Beyond encountering transphobic attitudes and having his gender identity discredited by being misgendered, Elijah also had experiences in social work school where he felt his trans identity was being questioned. Elijah commented that he felt as though people who go into social work "really like to analyze things". He related that when he approached staff for help with issues other than gender identity he faced "a lot of really weird outdated theories" about why he was trans and felt that they were "trying to get [him] to change [his] mind". Elijah expressed that he was confident in his masculine gender identity before coming to social work school and that it felt horrible to have that identity analyzed and drawn into question.

Blatantly negative or discrediting perceptions were not the only views that were expressed as having a detrimental impact on participants. Carter reflected "I feel like when you tell people that you're trans or talk about trans things, it's almost like the best that can happen is that someone could be friendly about it or neutral". Commenting on a situation where his superiors found out that he was trans and "did not care at all", Carter postulated,

"part of me thinks that if they don't care then that's not good either. You don't want to be the circus freak, but, on the other hand, you do want someone to see that this could be a valuable perspective". Carter's experience illustrates an acceptance of trans people that is superficial.

In one instance, in contrast to causing distress, others' perceptions had a positive impact. Zoe talked about the fear that surrounded transitioning and mentioned that her concern about others' perceptions stopped her from moving forward with her transition sooner. When she did come out, however, she encountered many supportive responses from her peers. She mentioned that:

> I came out in front of the class and they even clapped for me and congratulated me for having the courage to do this and they came out and gave me hugs and stuff and one person took me out for coffee afterwards. I felt like there was a lot of approval, like they wanted me to be happy so my peers were like 'whatever you have to do to be happy, do it up and we'll support you'.

Zoe emphasized that positive responses were very important to her and pointed out that others' affirmation helped her become more confident and gain the agency to become the person that she wanted to be.

Two pieces of visual data felt to me as though they spoke to the impact of others' perception on participants. Both pieces were in response to the first activity that invited participants to explore how gender impacted their experience studying social work. I invite you to take a minute to look at the images before reading my (re)presentation of the participants' thoughts. Corey's image:
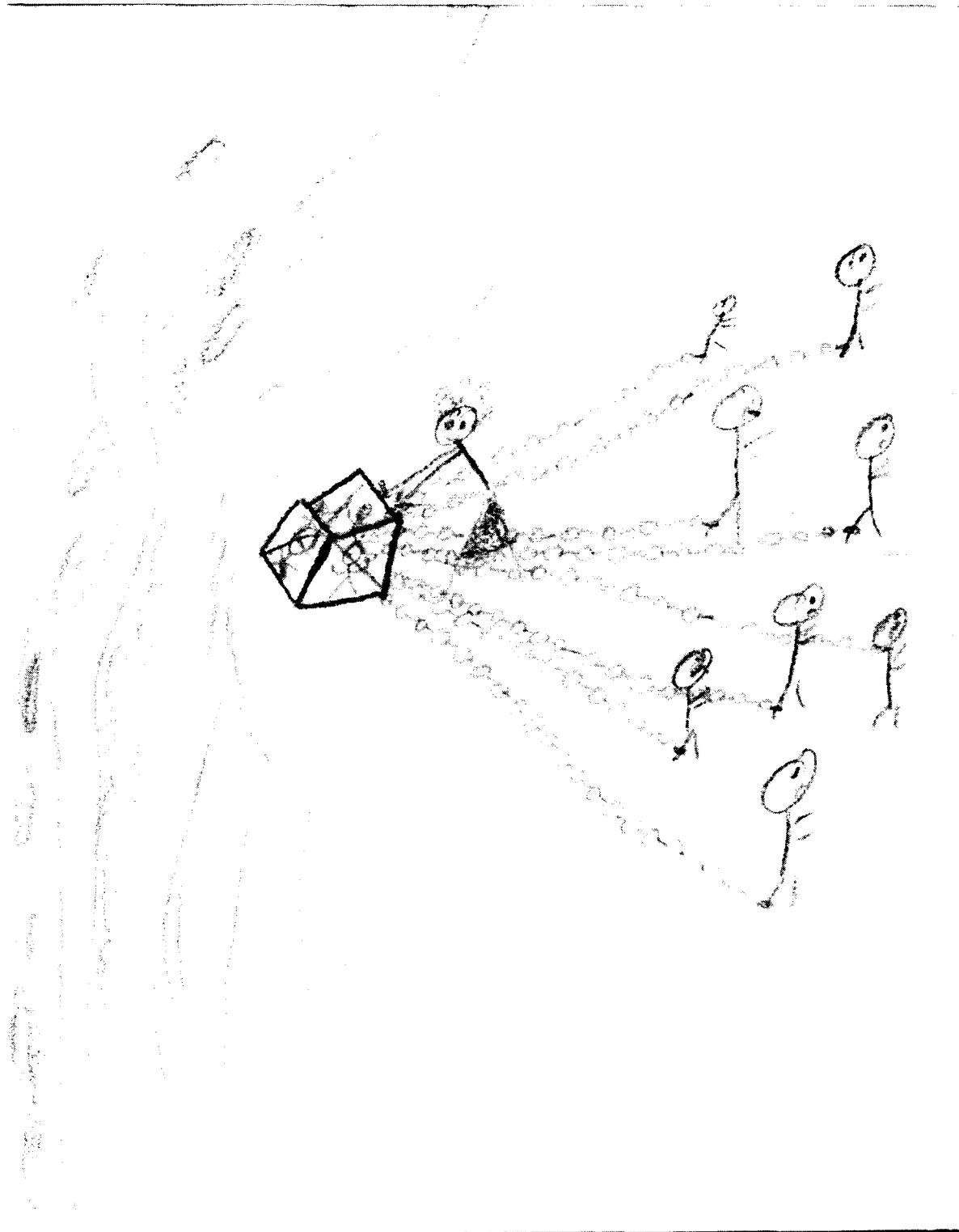
Figure 1: Corey Image: Other's Perceptions

According to Corey, the box represents the box that a number of us are put into with regards to our gender. The image of the curly haired person is meant to be Corey who is trying to push the box off the cliff so that it will open; however, she is struggling against the people chained to the box; people who want to stop her from tossing the box off the cliff. She mentioned that the image represents the interplay between the people who want the box to remain for their own power, control, and status and the people who want to break out of that box. To me, this relates well to the theme of 'others' perceptions' because it symbolizes the resistance from others that trans people often face in expressing their gender identity.

Elijah's Image:
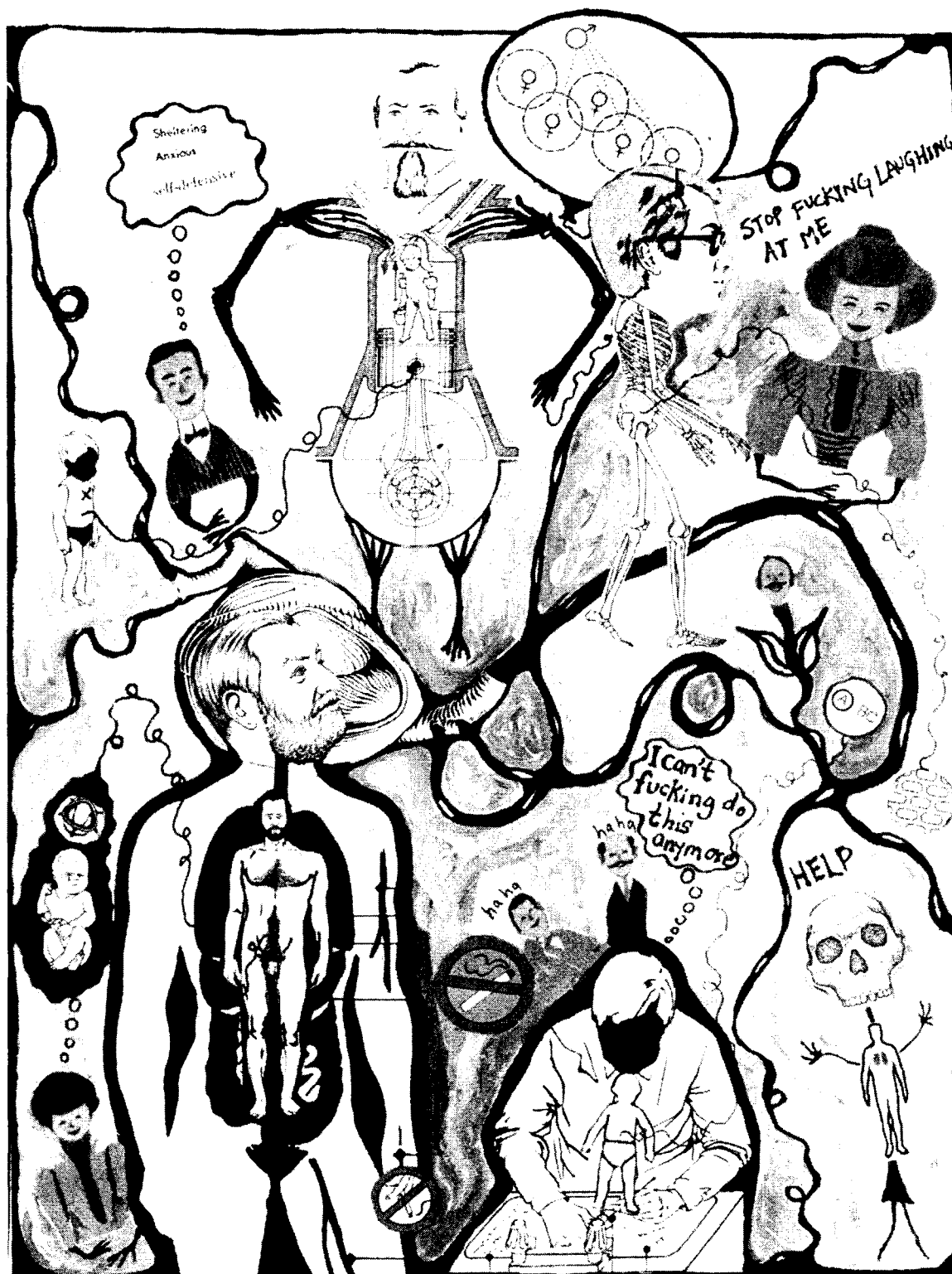
Figure 2: Elijah's Image: Other's Perception

Elijah described his piece as a visual representation of his struggle through the program. He communicated that the symbols of smaller children inside of larger children represented the regression that he experienced in his involvement in social work school. "I had to go back to the beginning. I was challenged to question my identity and I felt like a child". In the image, he identified people laughing at him and mentioned that he felt humiliated. He used an emaciated person to represent himself because of how extremely frustrated he felt. Alongside his art Elijah wrote the following narrative:

> I walked into my first day of social work school feeling every bit a man. My transition had enabled me to move from self-destructive behaviours and attempt to build a future for myself and my family.
>
> I did not know that my gender would be questioned at every turn. I began to question myself. Was my face more feminine than I thought? Was I delusional? Was my binder too loose? I was called 'a bright young woman' by one of my professors. Almost no one used the proper pronoun.
>
> I was lost. Frantically, inside myself, I began to break down. When I sought counselling, my trans identity (what I did NOT want to speak about) was questioned and analyzed.
>
> 'I am mad', I cried, and grief bubbled up from the depths of my belly.
>
> 'Please, let me be'
>
> I wanted to WALK AWAY

Elijah's artwork and narrative deeply communicates to me how impactful others' perceptions can be on one's sense of self and one's ability to succeed in the social work school environment.

Passing and being 'out'. In the context of thesis, being 'out' refers to whether or not others know one's gender identity and/or trans status. 'Passing' means being perceived as <u>not</u> trans for reasons of safety or personal choice. Carter pointed out the importance of acknowledging the term passing's relation to race and suggested that passing be considered "when someone is perceived to be a member of a more dominant group (i.e. white; non-trans; non-disabled; ect.)". 'Passing' and being 'out' can be complex conditions that are influenced by a number of factors and can evoke different feelings. Every participant in the group talked about 'passing' and/or being 'out' as an impactful part of their experience.

For some participants being 'out' as a trans person was sometimes difficult. Zoe expressed that when she transitioned, she felt she was "saying goodbye to a life that was comfortable [and moving] to one that was challenging and a lot more rewarding". Carter mentioned that the only instances in which he typically does not want to be 'out' are ones in which his safety may be in jeopardy. He spoke about the fear that sometimes accompanied being trans:

> What if something happens? What if people find out? 'Then they're going to assault
> me'. That's immediately where I go. It's because I know that it's not unreasonable to
> think that, but I feel like I spend a lot of time being fearful of things.

Given the complex feelings that sometimes come along with being 'out' as a trans person, it is extremely important to respect a trans person's decision about whether or not they want to be 'out' and in what situations they want to be visible as trans. Jordan expressed a situation, during a "step up, step back" activity meant to consider privilege, where he felt put on the spot. During the activity, he recounted:

there was a gender or trans related question, which was really fucked up because I

was the only person who was going to move and, then, in a split second I had to make

a decision about whether or not I wanted to do that.

Though Jordan acknowledged that it wasn't the instructor's intention to put him in a situation

where he was faced with deciding whether or not to step forward as a trans person, he

recounted the experience as being a little bit "painful" for him.

For participants who, for whatever reason, did not want to be out in certain

circumstances, there was sometimes a stress associated with 'passing'. Zoe expressed a

pressure to pass that came from hearing other people talk about trans people. She recounted

hearing others joke about trans women who did not pass and mentioned thinking "oh god, I'd

better pass". Elijah revealed that, for some reason, he found passing at school to be

particularly difficult. He remarked "'is my binder[2] too loose?' I kept wondering this and

ordering a tighter and tighter binder, thinking 'no, when I walk out into the world I pass one

hundred percent'". Unfortunately not being able to 'pass' for Elijah largely equated to not

having his gender identity respected which was extremely difficult for him.

Some participants indicated that, though trans visibility was important to them, they

did not feel they needed to be 'out' all of the time. Zoe shared "I'm not planning to go

stealth[3] or anything, but I don't feel like everyone needs to know all the time". Carter

mentioned that in the context of social work school not being 'out' was about not feeling

respected:

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[2] A binder is an undergarment worn by some trans guys in order to flatten their breasts with the goal of creating a more masculine looking chest.
[3] The term stealth is used to refer to a person who lives and passes completely as their desired gender and does not reveal to others that they are trans.

I'm not actually trying to keep it a secret, I'm not trying to live stealth here, that's not the point, but the point is that some of the people are such assholes that why should I bother talking to them about this? It's almost like it's precious information and they kind of wreck it.

Even if it was a struggle sometimes and they were not 'out' in all scenarios, many of the participants expressed that being 'out' was important to them. Zoe professed "I felt like I had a voice to share and I had to share it, otherwise my voice would be swallowed up by the cisgendered[4] population".

My own story. Though my gender identity and expression has evolved throughout my time at school, when I entered my program I distinctly identified as transmasculine. To my knowledge, I was the only trans person in the cohort of my MSW program. For me, one of the biggest consequences of not having other trans people in my program was the difficulty that I experienced in relation to coming out and openly feeling comfortable to express my gender identity. Although I eventually found some safe spaces where I was able to express myself, during most of my social work education I did not feel comfortable expressing this aspect of my identity. When I entered the program I chose not to make issue of my gender identity and allowed faculty and colleagues to make inaccurate assumptions about my gender. This seemed less vulnerable than coming out. To share my gender identity with someone, to ask them to call me by my chosen name, to request that they use male pronouns and then to have them disregard these requests felt more devastating to me than not saying anything at all. As I wrote in a personal narrative assignment for a one of my classes:

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[4] Cisgender is a term used to describe someone who is not trans. A person whose gender identity is congruent with what sie was assigned at birth.

It kills me when someone perpetually refers to me as ‘she’ after I've explicitly made a point of telling them about my identity and pronoun preference. Not making an effort to refer to me in the way that I have requested to be addressed (which I have requested not to make people's lives difficult but because it is in accordance with who I am) makes me feel like I'm a failure at conveying my gender, it invalidates my struggle and is disregarding not only of me personally but of transgender identities at large.

Although it seemed safer, not coming out for most of my program had its consequences. I did my best to distance myself from being misgendered but it still hurt. I felt cowardly for not coming out as if I was betraying an important part of myself.

One piece of art that I did prior to communicating with the participants about their experiences speaks to my experiences of negotiating the expression of my gender identity in social work. Please take a moment to engage with it before reading my response.
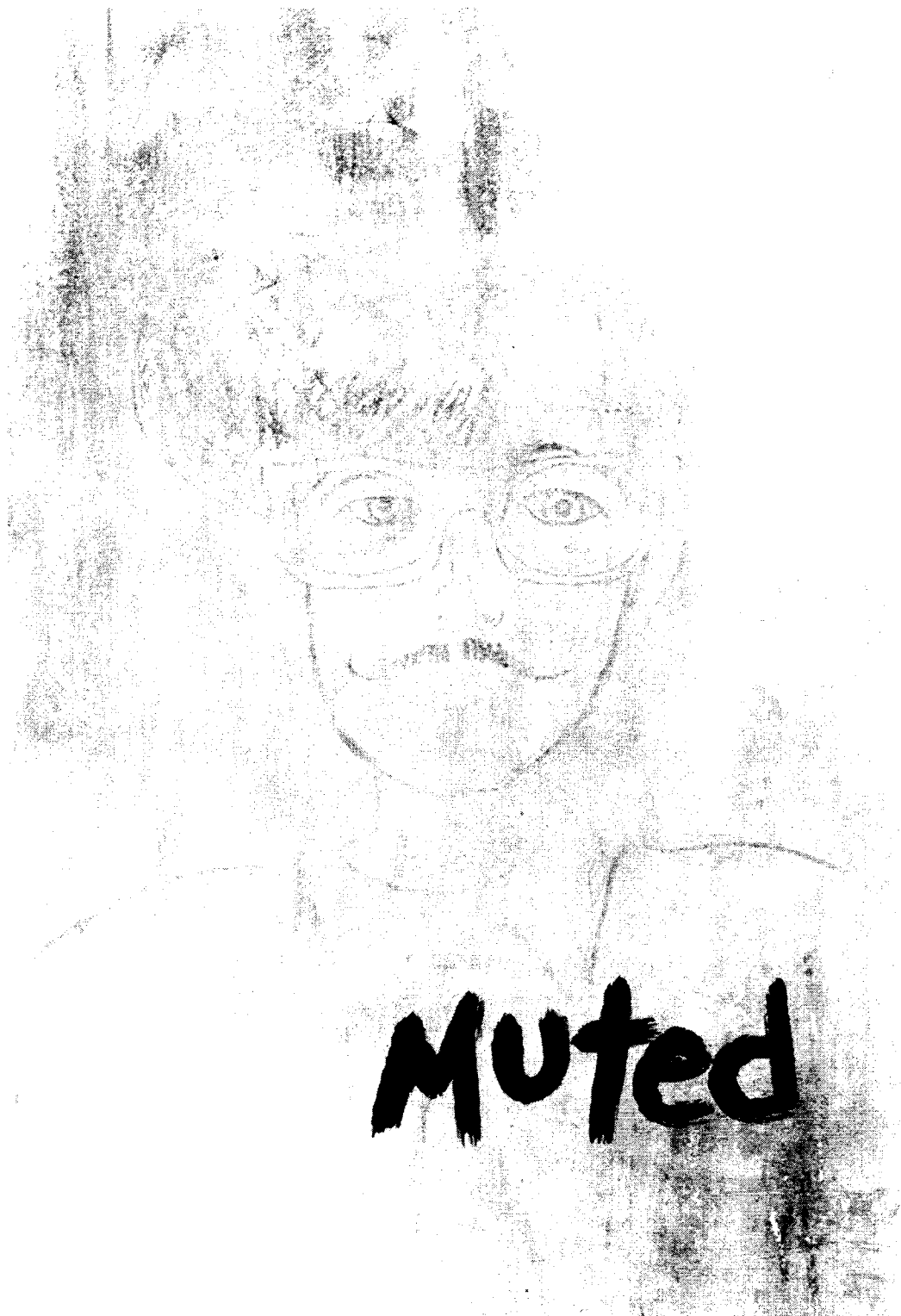
Figure 3: Arkell's Image: Personal Impacts

The image of the person is meant to be a self-portrait that represents me in my desired gender identity. The portrait is covered by a grey layer that is effectively muting the image. This image represents how I felt in my social work program. Though my trans identity was not denied or completely absent I felt it was muted. This quieting of my trans identity was a consequence of both where I was at personally and the environment of my social work program. Though the image represents me personally, it is also meant to communicate the general silencing of trans people's voices in social work education.

Ways of Coping With Difficulties

Although not all experiences were bad, many participants confronted challenges while studying social work. In light of some of the difficulties that participants faced, they all found ways of coping. All participants showed great resiliency in the face of adversity (be it big or small). Finding support from others outside of social work, as well as from key peers inside their program, was a common way in which participants dealt with challenging circumstances. Some participants were also supported by certain ideas, practices and/or beliefs.

Connection with others outside of social work. For all participants affirming relationships outside of schools of social work served as an important antidote to a school environment that was sometimes frustrating and/or harmful. For example, Elijah relayed that, for him, "coming home was a huge relief" and that he felt extremely grateful for his roommates and his queer community who provided him with reassurance during difficult times. For Zoe, having friends who understood and accepted her was really important. When Zoe transitioned, she was saddened by the fact that she lost some of her friends; however, she found new friends who accepted her for who she was and "it made [her] feel stronger".

All participants specifically mentioned connection to queer/LGBT communities as being significant to them. Jordan stated, "I felt supported by the community that always supports me. So, my radical queer family" and mentioned that he felt "totally lucky" that he had a lot of queer and trans aware folks around him. Zoe commented that, because of the trans people that she has met in her city, she does not feel like she is alone anymore and declared that being part of an LGBT community "is a really powerful thing".

Having other trans individuals in one's life can also be a source of empowerment. Carter reflected, "I know a lot of trans activists that I find very inspiring, I'm less willing to take bullshit". Community for participants, therefore, not only functioned as a means of coping with the fallout of adverse experiences but also empowered individuals to confront and transform potentially negative situations.

Connection to those within social work. Although many of the participants emphasized that connections outside of social work were a main means of support, they also acknowledged the importance of connecting with individuals within the discipline. Participants reported that connecting with others in the field of social work, both inside and outside of their specific programs, provided them with a sense of solidarity and "made life easier".

Four of the participants specifically commented on the positive influence of connecting with other students. Corey identified that even though the program may not have been perfect she was able to find key allies who would back her up "no matter what happened". Elijah also found fellow students who "rallied around" him when his teacher refused to call him 'he' until he grew a mustache. He remarked, "it made me feel better to have their support".

Zoe found that transitioning made connecting with other students easier for her. She commented "I felt like I was more part of the community, both at college and university after I transitioned and I felt more comfortable with myself". Beyond acting as an ally in dealing with the challenges of being trans in social work school, Zoe found particularly meaningful friendships with a fellow student who served as great personal support for her during her transition.

Three of the participants referenced having professors with whom they found solidarity. Carter's art speaks to the importance and impact of having supportive faculty. Please take a minute to look at his artwork and react.
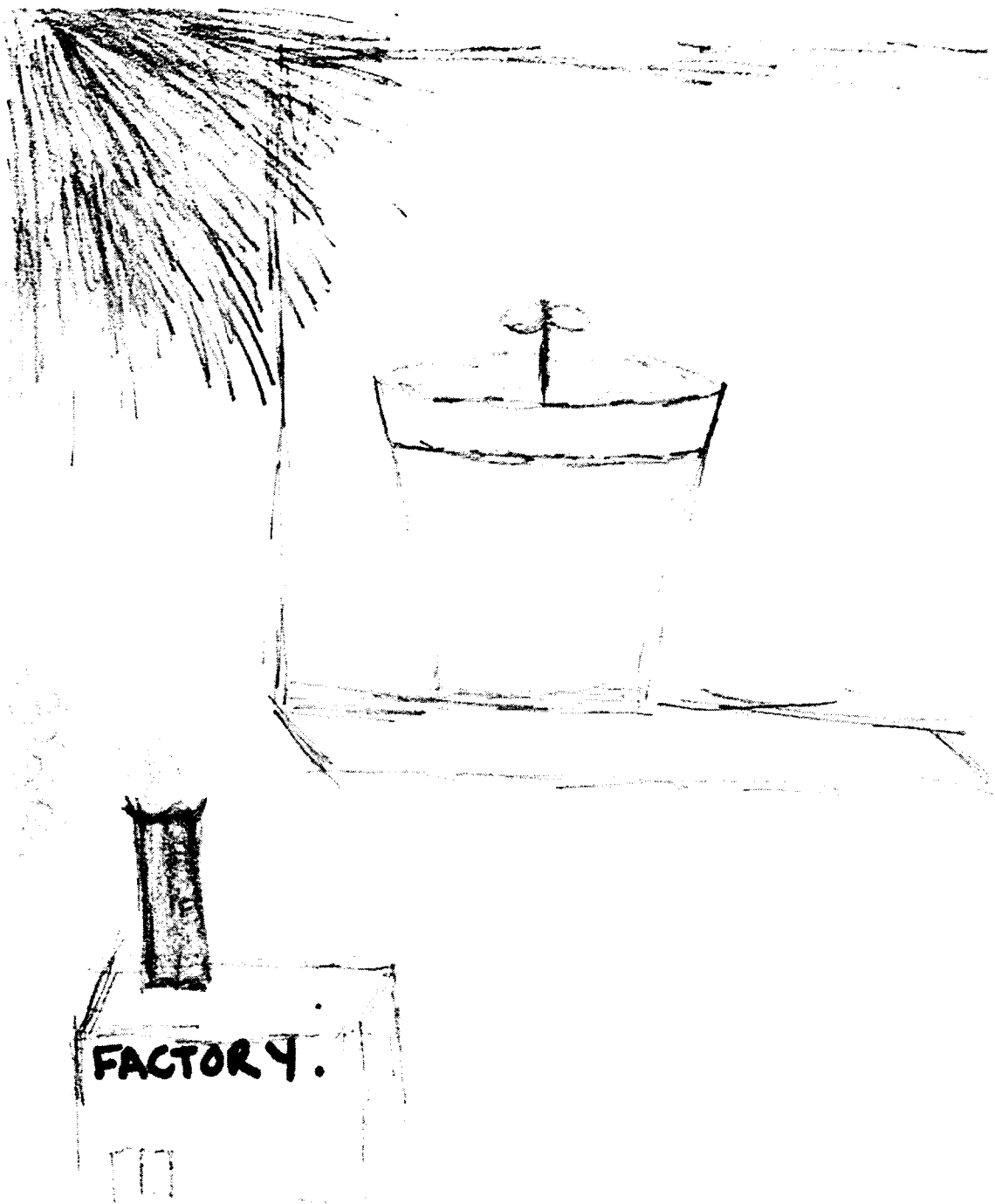
Figure 4: Carter's image: Connection to those within social work

According to Carter, this image is a little seedling inside a window with the sun shining down on it. Removed from the plant and sunshine at the bottom of the page is a factory. In reference to the picture, Carter mentioned that at one point during his involvement in the discipline of social work, he felt like the little seedling and that a faculty member at his school took him under hir wing (represented by the sunshine). He mentioned that he felt it was in light of trans stuff that this professor took him under hir wing and showed Carter "how things were done" in that specific educational environment. For Carter, the factory is meant to represent the rest of the university and the academic world that, in spite of everything, just keeps going on.

To me, this work communicates how vitally important it is to find nourishment from others, especially in an academic environment that can be uncaring and disregarding of trans experiences.

Supportive ideas/activities. Connecting with ideas and engaging in certain activities served to support many of the participants and helped them cope with the struggles that they confronted while studying social work.

Two of the participants spoke about spirituality or connection to the 'higher self' as a supportive concept. Corey, in particular, identified spirituality as something that was central to her and promoted it as a tool for empowerment in the face of oppression. She postulated "spiritual content is such an important part for anyone's ability to feel at home . . . [and can function] as a tool for empowerment and change". Corey also mentioned that the belief, held by some First Nations cultures, that two-spirited people are sacred impacted her experience. Corey, who attended a school that placed a large emphasis on Aboriginal ways of knowing, found that these beliefs contributed to feeling affirmed as a trans person. Though Aboriginal

beliefs most directly impacted Corey's experience, she also pointed out that trans people traditionally held a sacred place within many different religions/cultures such as Hinduism. Connecting with belief systems where trans people are validated helped counteract the effects of being trans in an environment that constructs trans identities as pathological.

Reading and engaging with the works of trans academics and other radical theorists helped support some of the participants. Different theories were mentioned including anti-oppressive theory, liberation education, community accountability and critical race theory. Trans academics were also mentioned as impacting. Carter identified that reading others' work made him feel better. He stated, "I try to read other people that are progressive, like Dean Spade. I find it amazing and it makes me feel better".

Jordan's art provides insight into the ideas and connections that he used to cope with the difficulties of his program. Take a minute to look at and respond to his work:

Figure 5: Jordan's image: Supportive ideas/activities

Jordan described his artwork as reflecting "all of the things that we came up with to make it through the program and all of the things that are just really awesome in the world". The image shows a "gay rainbow fortified by bricks of awesome" that separate "really cool shit and shit that really sucks". At the top of the page, representing what really sucks, are a bunch of white social workers in sweater vests that Jordan thinks "look really scary". On the other side of the rainbow barrier at the bottom of the page are things that supported Jordan. He stated "self-care supported me, flirting with really hot queers supported me, playing music really supported me, that sort of stuff".

In my opinion, Jordan's artwork highlights the power of ideas and activities to protect one from the negative aspects of social work school. Like Carter's artwork with the seedling, Jordan's art shows a separation between the self and the academic environment. The image of the gay rainbow barrier also speaks to the importance of the queer community in allowing this important separation.

My own story. Like many of the participants, I too found a great deal of support in my queer community. Having a queer community while I was in the program was extremely important to me because it provided me with a space where my desired gender identity was accepted, more or less, at face value and where I had folks to back me up if needed. I also made connections and felt supported by key students and faculty members in my program. I was, for example, moved when several professors from the social work department actively showed solidarity when the school's Pride organization was struggling to acquire a Pride Centre on campus. In the face of not being explicitly 'out' in all circumstances, having encouragement from certain professors was extremely validating and allowed me to gain confidence both academically and personally. Beyond interpersonal connections, I found

solace in doing artwork, cycling, gardening, reading, and meditating. Engaging in these activities gave me the break that I needed to be able to confront the struggles that arose during my program.

Reflections on the Program

Participants' experiences in social work education were affected by a number of things, both within their specific programs as well as within the broader university. Participants offered reflections about the resources available to them at the university, the existing social work environment, and the ways in which their programs addressed trans issues.

Trans resources at universities. The resources available to trans students varied from school to school and each participant had a different experience interacting with the resources available to them at school. More than one participant mentioned that they felt trans people, in general, face structural barriers in accessing post-secondary education. Some participants felt their school lacked resources appropriate for trans students and that their needs were not adequately acknowledged or met. Though not necessarily entirely satisfied with their school's achievements, other participants acknowledged their school's efforts to make the campus a more inclusive space for trans people.

Some of the participants asserted that in order for existing student resources to be effective for trans students, those providing the resources needed to have a basic knowledge of why trans experiences are unique. Corey felt that because her school did not have experience supporting trans people they did not always know how to meet her needs. She remarked, "they were supportive but did not quite understand". Elijah also encountered circumstances where he felt his needs were not being met in the school environment.

Although, like Corey, he acknowledged that people had good intentions, they were still not adequately prepared to support him. Elijah stated:

It was like pulling teeth to get them to listen to me and to take my concerns seriously. It was like they had the feelings and the compassion but they just did not have the frame of reference or the guidance that they needed to be able to change what was happening.

One participant shared an example of not having access to the necessary amenities at school. Sie stated that because of the way that the washrooms at hir school were laid out, sie did not feel comfortable going into them. Sie raised the concern to the university and reported that it took hir school five months to come up with an alternative washroom for hir to access. Not having access to this basic human right made hir feel very angry.

Two participants mentioned that their school had initiatives in place to make their campus a safer space for trans people. One participant shared that hir school had a trans needs committee. Sie mentioned that the committee is "looking at physical space, basic things like bathrooms and residences and trans policies". Another participant shared that hir school was campaigning for a gender neutral washroom. So, in spite of some of the negative experiences of participants, there is some headway being made at some schools to make universities more inclusive for trans peoples.

Existing social work environment. Many of the participants found the current social work environment to be less than ideal and consequently held negative feelings towards social work. In spite of the fact that social work values should direct the discipline to be otherwise, several participants reported that they felt there were elements of transphobia, homophobia, and racism present in the discipline.

Three of the participants explicitly mentioned the predominance of racism in their experiences studying social work. Jordan remarked, "the pervasive element of destruction in the program was around racism; how racist it was and also the legacy of racism within social work". For example, participants identified unacknowledged prejudices towards Aboriginal peoples as well as the persistence of a colonialist structure of organizing. These racist tendencies were concerning for participants and it was expressed that if the discipline is going to move forward with regards to trans issues that issues of race also have to be addressed.

When talking with others, Elijah found that social work had a reputation for being transphobic and homophobic. He shared, "I've heard a lot of people say, since I've opened up about these experiences that social work happens to be one of the more homophobic and transphobic faculties". Homophobia within schools of social work was cited by several participants. One participant expressly commented that, while sie was in social work school, sie felt like sie was in "this really homophobic place". More than one participant also commented on how heteronormative the social work environment was. Elijah remarked, "I've found that there is a lot of reference to heterosexual couples, even gay or lesbian people, bi-sexual people, and other people of alternate sexualities are not covered in social work. It's not inclusive".

In terms of transphobia, participants' experiences outlined in the "others' perceptions" section of the findings may help to account for some of their resentment regarding the current social work environment. Other conditions that were mentioned as contributing to this problematic environment included the school's assumption that trans people are always necessarily visible and the dismissal of trans voices. Non-affirming

elements of the current social work environment strongly influenced how Carter approached

his studies. He mentioned:

> I'm not going to put my whole self out there in front of this academic bullshit
>
> machine so that I can get shot down. What I want to do is get my degree and then I'm
>
> going to do more work with our communities in a way that *we* want to do it.

The organizational structure of social work school and the theoretical approach that

the school took also contributed to participants perceptions of the social work environment.

Carter expressed that his school was very hierarchical and that, as a student, others have a lot

of control over what you do. He further mentioned that his program was based on very

conservative, traditional, "old school" ideas of social work and that the program disregarded

certain contemporary social work theories. He reported that anti-oppressive practice, for

example, was "scoffed" at and considered "bogus" by many of his professors. In response to

this, he remarked, "if they can't even show a basic respect for critical social work, trans

people are not even on the radar". Jordan also struggled with the foundations of the

discipline. In his experience, social work simultaneously desired and worked towards

effecting social change while working towards maintaining the current order and not

allowing for this social change to happen. In his own words, the fact that "social work

impacts opposite things at the same time" was really 'awkward' and 'confusing' for him.

As a result of this current social work environment participants expressed shattered

expectations as well as feelings of disappointment and disillusionment. Reflecting on social

work education, Jordan expressed, "I expected more from social work education in terms of

being aligned with a desire or yearning for justice and when the program did not carry that

for me I was kind of heartbroken". Elijah remarked:

I went into the social work field feeling like it would be more tolerant and less

discriminatory than other fields. I thought that it would be more accepting than it has

been and I'm really disappointed in my experiences and the experience of other queer

people that I've talked to.

Carter also expressed a sense of hopelessness regarding the discipline. He remarked that

what he hopes for social work is so far away from the way that things are right now that he

does not even want to think about it.

Program's approach to trans issues. Most of the participants indicated that they felt

trans issues were not well represented in their programs. Corey remarked, trans issues are

"still at the background of our program" and that "it is very much a closed conversation".

Zoe felt similarly to Corey and expressed that trans issues are "ignored in academia".

Participants found that trans experiences, if discussed at all, were often relegated to a couple

of pages in a text book or a single lecture done by the "person from the local queer resource

centre" and were focused on things like suicide and depression and left out other experiences.

Beyond being downplayed, Carter found that, in his experience, bringing forward

trans issues in social work was not welcomed. He commented, "[people's attitudes] are like,

'we don't care, can you please stop talking about that, we don't really want to hear about

that'". He felt that there was a "don't ask, don't tell" sense and that while there is a pressure

to "be visible [when] we are visible they don't really give a shit". Carter put his experience in

social work into perspective by reflecting on an experience that he had with an organization

outside of his program. He suggested "there I actually feel valued for what I bring, for all of

what I bring and I see how it's different because I can actually talk about [being trans]".

Corey, Elijah, Zoe, and Carter all commented that, in their experiences in social work education, there was a tendency to collapse trans issues with those of sexual identity and present it as one all-encompassing LGBT category. Participants took issue with this approach because they found that there was often an inaccurate conflation of gender and sexual identity, which resulted in an inadequate discussion about issues specific to trans people. Zoe found that when educators talked about LGBT, they presented trans experiences and those of sexual identities in a homogenous manner that did not capture the complexities of trans experiences. She suggested that although she does not think that role of sexual minorities should be dismissed or that the two groups should be separated "community wise," she felt that "trans experiences are a lot more nuanced" and, therefore, demand specific attention.

More than one participant commented on the fact that suicide and depression were primarily focused on when talking about LGBT issues and that the information that was presented was not enough to understand the issues. For example, Elijah commented that the information that he encountered was "really basic" and "a huge generalization" and Corey mentioned that she felt that there was no real emphasis on how to support a trans person.

Participants raised the point that, if trans issues are not going to be paid a great deal of attention to, then educators need to be careful about how trans issues are brought up. Carter mused:

> they don't deserve to talk about it if they can't talk about it in a way that's respectful because then they're just talking about us and, you know what, I'm like 'fuck you guys, don't worry about it, just shut up, it's more damage than it's worth'.

The lack of transgender content in social work education impacted participants personally as well as raising concerns about the capacity of social workers to serve trans clients. A lack of exposure to trans issues for students and members of faculty in schools of social work contributed to the environment which trans students encountered. Elijah mentioned that, during his struggles in school, he encountered the excuse "I've never dealt with a trans person before" which frustrated him because it does not justify treating someone with "less respect and cultural competence". In terms of social work practice, Corey raised the concern that the lack of trans content could have a negative impact on a social worker's ability to deal with trans clients and mentioned that this was reflected by the current state of social service delivery, especially in child welfare.

My own story. I found that the university on a whole was not a particularly accommodating space for trans people, particularly those of non-binary expressions or in the midst of transition. Gender neutral washrooms were few and far between and, in many instances, the bureaucratic nature of the establishment demanded fixed gender categories. Not being able to have my chosen name on my student file was particularly difficult for me. It created a situation where, in order to have my preferred name acknowledged, I had to correct people and essentially 'come out', which felt vulnerable. As a result, I ended living something of a double life where I was known one way in my community and another in school. This was not only demoralizing but caused some confusion when the two worlds overlapped.

I also found social work education to be rather hetero and gender normative. Though the topic of gender was discussed frequently in classes, conversations were largely focused on oppression faced by cisgender women. Though I acknowledge women's struggles and

don't think that we should cease these conversations, they aren't the *only* conversation that

we should be having. By presenting only one perspective on gender I found that the

discipline reinforced normative assumptions about gender and sex that erased trans identities.

The gender normativity of social work education directly contributed to my difficulties

feeling comfortable expressing my gender identity and has the potential of leaving graduates

of social work ill prepared to deal with trans clients.

In spite of the fact that trans experiences were largely absent from my program's

general curriculum, I felt my program was set up in a way that encouraged me to focus my

energy in a direction that was geared towards my thesis topic; consequently, I was able to

direct a lot of attention to trans studies and insert some trans content into the courses that I

was in. Though this was positive for me, I feel this was a unique characteristic of being a

graduate student and that my relationship to trans issues, rather than the discipline, directed

me to that place.

Ways to Improve Social Work.

After identifying some aspects of their programs that impacted their education and

giving insights into the current status of social work education's treatment of trans issues,

participants shared their reflections of what they hoped for social work education.

Participants discussed the need for openness, an increased dialogue about trans issues, and

the necessity of adopting an intersectional approach. They also talked about incorporating

gender theory and the desire for a more experiential approach to learning.

Openness. Several participants commented on how important they felt it was for

those within the discipline of social work to be self-reflexive and open to acknowledging

their prejudices about trans issues and beyond. Elijah found that people in social work were

not very open about acknowledging their prejudices and hopes that this changes. He
remarked:

> People aren't willing to talk about the trouble that they have with specific
>
> marginalized groups of people, including trans people but definitely not only trans
>
> people. I would just appreciate it if people were more honest and [would] just say
>
> 'hey look I don't understand' or 'I'm really challenged; I feel like I have some issues
>
> dealing with this'.

Elijah proposed that part of this process of acknowledgment for educators is to be open to
learning from trans peoples so that "they know what they're talking about before they choose
to educate others about it". Two participants commented favorably of faculty members
within their programs who admitted their faults and were open to taking direction. For
example, Jordan recounted his interaction with the professor after the "step forward/step
back" exercise that made him feel uncomfortable: "She was really awesome about being like
'yeah, that was totally shitty and I'm not going to do that again' and actually took a moment
to consider changing her behaviour around that".

Participants felt that it was important for social work students to recognize their
biases before going out into the field. Corey felt that, because of the prevalence of "biases
and mythologies" towards trans people, it is important for students in schools of social work
to engage in self-reflexive activities that challenge them to explore how they see themselves
and what prejudices they have towards others. Alongside being open to acknowledging
biases, Elijah felt that it was important to be able to identify and quickly address any issues
that arise in schools of social work "so that nobody has to go through [an issue] over and
over again".

Jordan communicated his hope that the discipline, as a whole, would acknowledge its history and address "why people really fucking hate social workers and don't trust them". He felt this acknowledgment was integral to the discipline's ability to strive towards social justice and make any sort of positive change. He remarked, "I think that if you can develop a framework that starts with that acknowledgement and works through how to do healing and how to do better holistic work then not being assholes to trans people falls under that". Furthermore, Jordan suggested that social workers must acknowledge and align themselves with the work that people are already doing without them and position themselves in a way that works towards best supporting these existing efforts.

One of Elijah's artistic responses speaks to the need for openness in social work education. Please take a minute to look at his piece before reading his response:
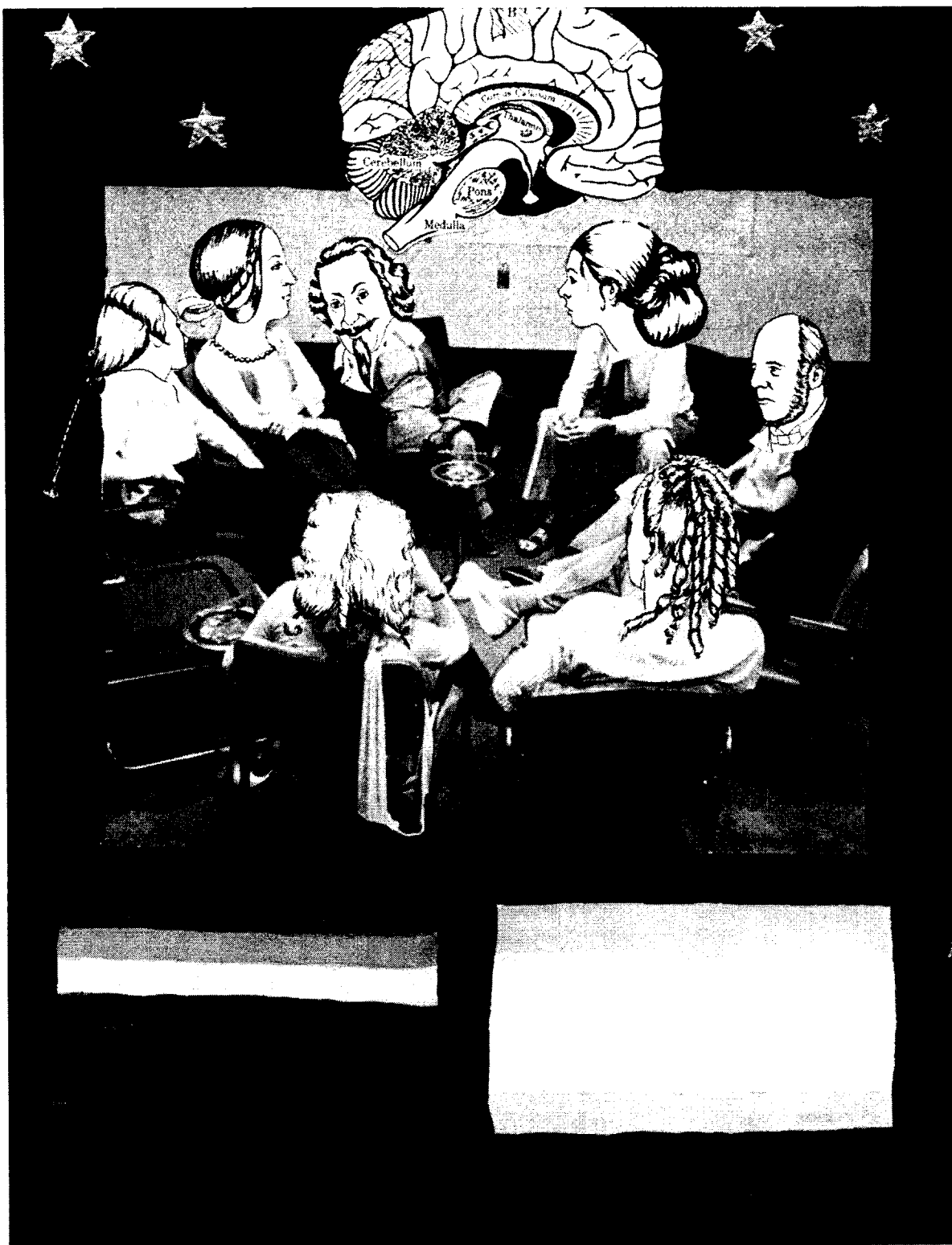
Figure 6: Elijah's image: Openness

Elijah recounted that when he closed his eyes and imagined what "could have made my life and other people like us, our lives, easier in this field" he saw "a lot more honesty and a lot more discussion". He continued:

> so my art is just a bunch of people sitting around having a discussion. They are all
>
> different and it does not matter and they're just chilling and actually being open and
>
> honest with each other about what gender means to them and what their prejudices
>
> are and not bullshitting.

He reported that the image was of a group meeting situation and noted that he changed everybody's heads around to make them not match their gender body. Below the image of the meeting is the trans flag and the pride flag.

Dialogue. Many of the participants called for an increase in dialogue about trans issues in social work education. Elijah professed, "what I'm hoping happens in social work is that there is more dialogue about gender differences. I feel like in a four year educational program in social work there should be some space for that". Improved dialogue in social work education was considered by participants to benefit both trans students by creating a safer environment for them, as well as non-trans students by preparing them to be able to sensitively approach trans clients.

Elijah expressed a hope that social work education would incorporate basic information about trans people at the very beginning of the program. He felt this was an important step in making the school environment safer for trans students. He declared, "I think, especially due to the very personal nature of some of the material that you're dealing with in social work classes, with sharing and things like that, that it's really important to get it out of the way quickly". He recommended that this initial piece of trans education include

a conversation about discrimination towards trans people and information about "zero tolerance policies for behavior that is inappropriate". According to Elijah, the conversation should be matter of fact and outline basic trans etiquette including such things as the "pronoun conversation" and "ways to ask questions that are more polite".

Some participants felt that having a dialogue about trans issues was integral for social work students to be able to serve the transgender population. More than one participant pointed out that the lack of discussion around trans issues in social work education was a concern because clinical social workers will most likely, at some point in their career, encounter a trans client. Zoe commented, "clinicians would benefit from the expertise that our community has to offer" because if a social worker "does not know what they're talking about, then that's one more person that a trans person isn't going to be helped by". Corey felt this dialogue was particularly relevant to those working in child welfare. She pointed out that gender identity is not something that child welfare workers discuss. According to Corey, if gender identity isn't taken into consideration then a gender-variant/trans youth could easily be put in an environment that is just as abusive and non-affirming as the place that they came from. Furthermore, Corey pointed out that this may be a contributing factor in the disproportionately high rates of homelessness among LGBT youth.

More than one participant recommended that trans issues be integrated into social work curriculum. Carter made mention of having a course that was explicitly focused on trans issues. He reflected:

> I think it might be good if we could have some focused courses because then we
>
> could get some social workers out there that actually know how to do the work with

our communities. . . . If we could actually train some people who are critical thinkers to do this, then we might actually be able to make more change.

Beyond having specific courses, it was suggested that trans examples be used in classes and that readings by trans academics be included in courses. In spite of desiring more trans content, it was emphasized that educators need to be aware of the content which they include. Elijah remarked, "I think that [professors] need to be educated before they open their mouths and educate other people". Carter declared, "I can just imagine if they are going to start talking about GID without a depathologizing lens, you know, they're not going to get it" Furthermore, Carter emphasized that trans readings need to be from trans perspectives. He remarked "I would say incorporate readings written **by** trans people, not **about** trans people. I don't want to have to hear what fucking Ken Zucker[5] has to say about trans people". He called for examples in classes that affirm trans identities and take into account the actual experiences of trans people. Carter further recommended that respectful trans curriculum be written into social work education policy. He suggested, "if the Canadian Association of Social Work Education could add something, that would be a good thing because that would impact all of the schools in terms of accreditation".

Intersectional approach. Several participants acknowledged the need for an intersectional approach to studying social work. In my understanding, an intersectional approach posits that various different aspects of social location are not independent, but interact with each other on multiple levels; different forms of oppression, therefore, must not be conceptualized separately.

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[5] Ken Zucker is a Toronto based psychologist who is known for promoting reparative therapy that forces gender-variant children to conform to traditional expectations of male and female behavior.

Some participants identified that their experiences of being trans influenced their understanding of oppression. They postulated that their own experiences of being oppressed opened up their eyes to other elements of oppression. Cory spoke to the awareness of the oppression that she gained from being trans. She commented, being trans "influences my understanding of oppression, of what it's like when a group is not acknowledged as being as legitimate as other groups. This influences me in terms of understanding what other [marginalized] groups experience". Two participants also made mention of alliances that were formed between themselves and members of other marginalized groups and pointed out that they felt it was because they were trans that these alliances took place.

Several of the participants expressed their hope that social work education could strive for an increased diversity in both the content and the people involved in schools of social work. In Corey's experience, the discipline of social work tended to be dominated by white females, which struck Corey as limiting. She remarked "you need a little bit more, more males, more people of colours, different cultures, different genders etc. to really enhance that program. When it's [mostly] white females it really limits the perspectives and experiences". Elijah also spoke about the importance of diversity. He expressed that in order to foster an inclusive environment and develop an inclusive practice model, exposing students to diversity was important in social work education.

Several participants brought up the fact that racism was an issue in social work education that needed to be addressed. Particular mention was made to the continued effects of colonization on Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Elijah likened trans experiences in social work education to those of the Aboriginal people. He commented "it's a lot like the issues I feel Aboriginal people in this country are having in the area of social work education.

Nobody is willing to admit their prejudices". Jordan, in particular, emphasized the

importance of an intersectional approach. He commented:

> what I hope and dream for social work is that it develops an intersectional analysis
>
> around oppression. So I don't actually think that more trans content is where I would
>
> want to steer social work education. Again, the sort of pervasive element of
>
> destruction in the program was around racism, how racist it was as well as the legacy
>
> of racism within social work.

Carter gave an example that illustrates why an intersectional approach is so important when

considering or discussing trans issues in social work education:

> If you don't have a critical race lens when talking about trans people, then what are
>
> you really going to get out of our experience? It's like when talking about trans day of
>
> remembrance[6], [without taking race into consideration] you wouldn't understand that
>
> the reality is that most people that are experiencing this kind of violence are trans
>
> women of colour.

Zoe was the only participant who mentioned that she was actually subjected to some

social work theory that promoted an intersectional approach. She commented that, in contrast

to her experience in college, her university social work program included some theory about

oppression and privilege and how everything interacts.

Jordan's artistic response to the activity "using your imagination, consider what you

hope social work education looks like in the future" struck me as relevant to this theme.

Please take a minute to experience Jordan's art and read the words that appear on the page

before moving onto Jordan's reflections on the piece.

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[6] Trans day of remembrance in an event that happens every November in different cities across the world. The purpose of the event is to memorialize individuals who have been killed throughout the world based on anti-transgender hatred.
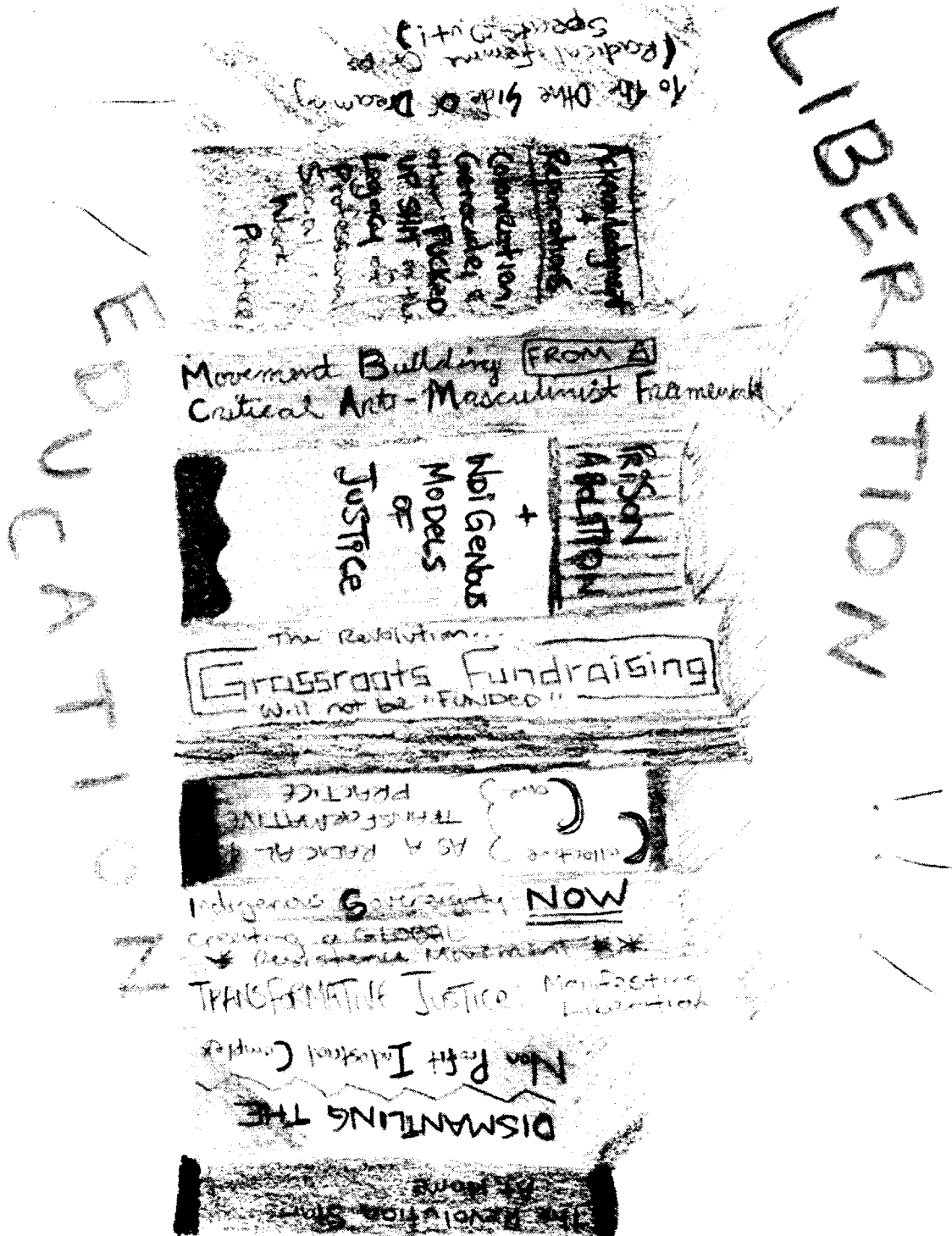
Figure 7: Jordan's image: Intersectional approach

In this work, Jordan imagined things that he wished would have been included in his social work education and came up with a series of mostly made up books. He remarked, "it is a beautifully coloured book case and all the books have titles and all the books are books that I wish that I had read while I was doing social work". The books are all aspects of what Jordan felt was "liberation education". The bookcase contained two real books: Chen, Dulani, and Piepzna-Samarasinha (2011) and INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (2007).

To me, this piece touches on the importance of critically addressing issues of marginalization from many different levels and drawing from the knowledge of many different communities. The bookshelf is also host to books that both focus on practical skills and theoretical knowledge and emphasizes the necessity of garnering practical tactics to promote justice. I feel the fact that there are no books that are specifically about trans issues speaks of breadth of foundational learning that must be addressed alongside gender in order to approach trans issues in a non-problematic way.

Gender theory. Some participants made it clear that they felt social work education should talk about gender in a way that is inclusive of the whole trans umbrella and includes non-binary gender identities. Elijah and Corey both explicitly emphasized the need to be inclusive of all gender identities. Corey felt that social work must understand "number one, that there are more than two genders and that the multiple layers of gender identity or gender expression are complex and not always linear". Corey went on to suggest that once that concept is understood, then we can explore how society interacts with those diverse expressions and identify oppression based on gender variance.

While the inclusion of all gender identities, even those that do not conform to the binary gender system, was promoted as important, some participants cautioned against the use of a deconstructivist approach to gender identity in social work. Carter mentioned, "I don't like to think about gender as a presentation and that whole discussion because I feel it sort of ignores the real lives of trans people". Zoe gave an example of confronting this attitude in one of her classes and shared how it made her feel. She recounted,

> one girl [in my class] said something that really pissed me off and I had to say
> something to it. She was like 'if gender is a social construct, why do trans people
> have to transition?' Oh god, oh god, oh god, anger, anger, I was so pissed.

As evidenced by Zoe's experience, this theoretical approach can, intentionally or unintentionally, discredit the legitimacy of transsexual identities by positioning transsexuals as essentialists who enforce the gender binary. This fails to take into account that, in our current society, everyone enforces the gender binary in one way or another and that transsexuals have as much right their own gendered embodiment as anyone.

Experiential. Several of the participants communicated that they believe schools of social work should emphasize an experiential component to learning. Corey felt that, although schools of social work theoretically value experiential learning, they fell short of enacting this approach. She communicated that within the current educational structure there are "A students" who do not necessarily have the practical skills to work with people in the field. Zoe described university social work programs as focused on didactic learning and commented that her program was "kind of like 'sit in a desk and listen to some professor jammer on for 3 hours'". Zoe acknowledged that the theoretical elements of what she was learning in university were important, but felt they were not being taught to her in her

preferred way. Corey agreed that although theory is valuable it shouldn't supersede experiential learning. Furthermore, Corey felt that experiential learning was important in relation to trans issues because "there is a real life experience that they cannot account for in the literature".

Along the lines of wanting more experiential learning, Corey mentioned additionally that she would like to see changes in the ways that classes are organized. She mentioned, for example, that she would like to see classes meet in a circular formation rather than in rows. Corey commented that in most classes you see the back of each other's heads and remarked, "[in a circle] when you see each other, there is less of a hierarchy between the instructor and the students; they [the students] can also see each other and there is more interaction between everyone".

Note: I have left out "my own story" in this section because my perspective on how to improve social work education will be focused on in the discussion chapters.

Difference Between Urban and Rural

Participants shared many reflections and experiences in response to their consideration of the differences between urban and rural environments. Many of the participants made a further distinction between major urban centres and smaller cities. Although it was acknowledged that smaller cities were not the same as rural environments, the participants expressed a discrepancy between smaller cities and major urban centres.

In the experience of some participants, rural environments and smaller cities were characterized by limited supports for trans people, less trans visibility/exposure, and a greater sense of danger. Carter postulated, "in the rural setting I think we're more quiet; we're more suspicious of people; we're more like animals; we're like very tip toey, looking around, very

cautious, aware that it could be dangerous". Elijah recounted that when he was a kid growing up in a small town, "he was bullied like crazy because [he] couldn't hide [his] gender identity/ sexual orientation". In Zoe's experience, some people in the smaller city that she lived in were "jerks" and openly prejudiced. She remarked "people did not care, they would wear their ignorance or their bigotry on their sleeve because no one would challenge them". Carter found that in rural settings trans people are required to be more focused on their daily needs and must work to gain access to certain necessary services. He mentioned that health care and physical safety were two major aspects that trans people must focus on in rural environments. Corey found that even in trans communities in rural environments there was less understanding of gender diversity and that non-binary gender expressions were not accepted.

Participants acknowledged that it was typical for trans people to move away from rural communities and go to major urban centres. This movement was thought to be because urban centres were characterized by a larger trans community, access to more supports, and more exposure to trans issues. Zoe found that people in cities are more familiar with trans issues. She shared, "in [small northern city] it could have been something that [people] saw on TV but down here [major urban city] it's a lot more of a reality for people". She also found that, while the city wasn't free from discrimination, there was much more of a community to support her. Carter also expressed that there was more access to trans community in cities. He stated, "if I were in [a major urban centre] if I wanted I could see trans people every single day. Talk to trans people, see trans people, surround myself. I can basically have my entire circle be trans people if I wanted".

Although most participants acknowledged that there were greater formal and informal supports for trans people in larger cities, they expressed some challenges associated with these environments. For example, Carter mentioned that many trans people in the city don't recognize how lucky they are to be around such a large trans population. He observed that trans people in the city are sometimes, what he called, "spoiled". He stated, "being spoiled means that [there are] so many trans people around that trans people become disposable. So, we can treat each other like shit. I've seen people really shut someone out just because they don't like how they did something".

In spite of having more people to connect with in the city, some participants also mentioned that making meaningful connections was harder. Corey expressed that "sometimes [in the city] there is a feeling of being alone in the crowd". Elijah, recounting what it felt like coming to the city from the small town he grew up in, stated "I remember I would take bus rides to the city and think 'I wish I was just like invisible' and when I got to the city that was exactly how I felt". Elijah also found that the venues for meeting people in the city were based on certain activities that he did not want to participate in. He stated, "in the city, it's harder to connect with people unless you're partying and into the bar scene and stuff like that".

Even though there were fewer chances to connect with people and fewer supports, some participants felt the connections that were fostered in rural environments were deeper and more significant. Growing up in a rural environment, Elijah found a small community of queers with whom he intensely connected. He recounted, "I had really deep, deep connections when I was a kid in my small town. I am grateful for that; it probably saved my life, finding two other people who were like me". Carter also expressed the bond associated

with finding someone who was like him. He noted, "because we're more isolated it forces us to rely on other people more, you know, like allies. Then when you find another trans person, you're so happy!" Another aspect of rural life that was identified as positive was strong family relations. Corey mused, "although there is not as much support in rural communities, if there is anything there is family".

I found that both Elijah and Corey's artwork strongly communicated themes surrounding the rural/urban dynamic. Please take a minute to look at Corey's artwork before reading her response.

Figure 8: Corey's image: Difference between urban and rural

In Corey's artwork, the different coloured dots represent the trans people who are around and expressing their trans identity. The left corner is meant to represent the rural environment where there are few people expressing trans identities. In contrast, on the top right corner (the city) "there is a cluster of colours and dots, which means that there are more people out and connected". The markings between the two sections are meant to visually represent the movement from rural environments to bigger centres.

The following is Elijah's artwork, please take a minute to look at it before reading his response:
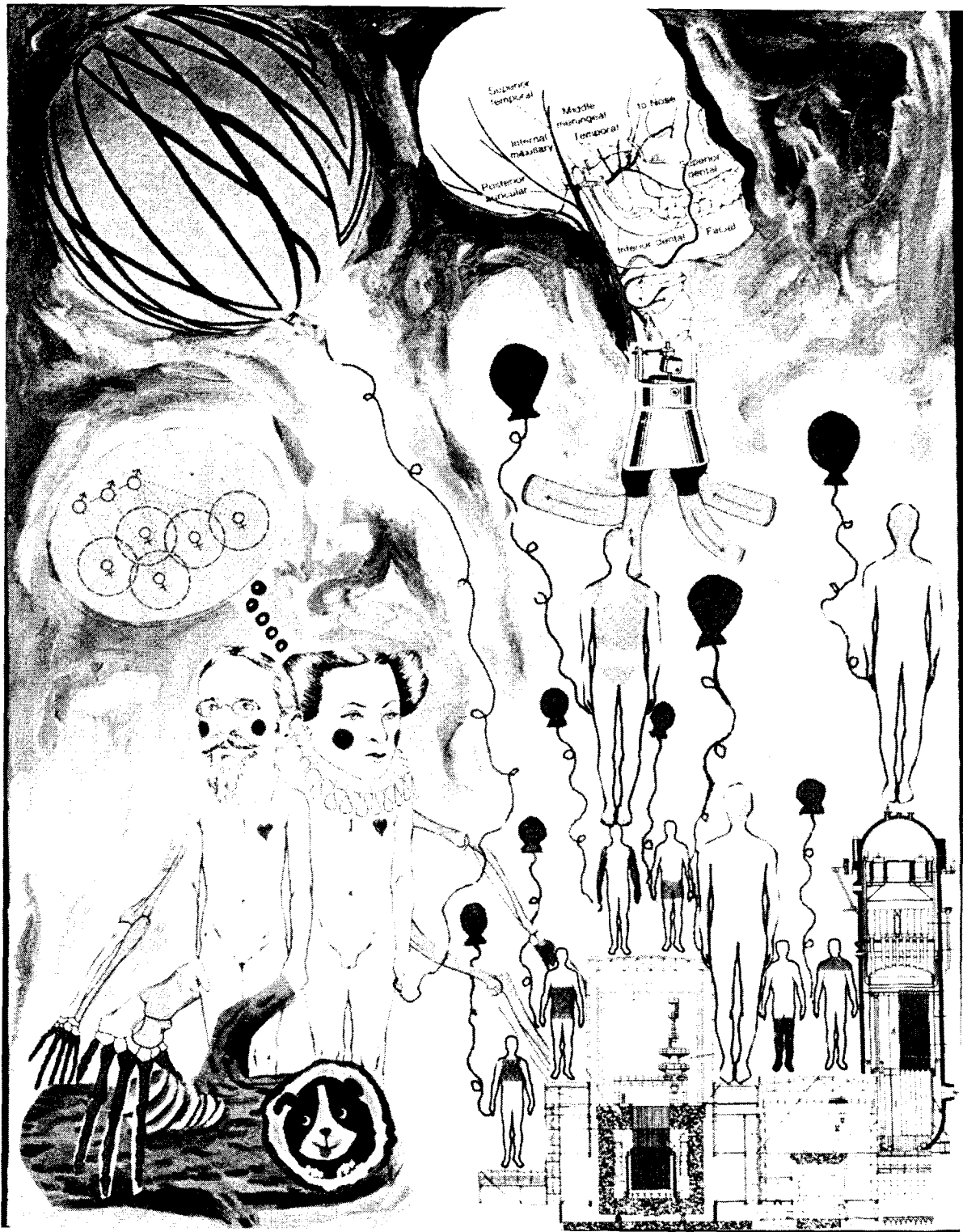
Figure 9: Elijah's image: Difference between urban and rural

Elijah commented that this piece was informed by his experience growing up in a small town and moving to the city when he was in his early twenties. The images on the left are meant to represent the rural setting. Elijah pointed out that on the rural side of the picture there is a representation of a very deep connection between two individuals who were, as he put it, "lucky to find each other". The connection between the two individuals in the rural setting is juxtaposed by the faceless, disconnected bodies that intensely populate the city side (positioned to the right of the rural). Through this imagery, Elijah wanted to convey that, although there may be a lot more people in the city, it is harder to forge deep relationships in that environment.

Experiences Doing Art

During the interviews, all participants spoke about their experiences doing the creative activities for the project. Some participants found the activities to be therapeutic, while some encountered frustrations during the process. Many participants found that participating in the creative activities was valuable overall.

Several of the participants expressed that the creative activities gave them a chance to process experiences of which they had not yet had the chance. More than one participant used the word "cathartic" to describe the experience of doing the art activities for the project. Elijah shared his experience in creating the art:

> I feel like it was really good for me to be able to look at something concrete and tangible on a piece of paper that sort of sums up my experience so that it's not just scattered around in my mind. I do have a lot of feelings about it that I haven't had a safe space to really talk about. So yeah, I appreciated that a lot.

Zoe expressed that doing the creative activities gave her the opportunity to process her feelings and experiences. She commented, "it was really good for me to get those feeling out from a while ago". She also felt the activities facilitated self-reflection. She remarked:

> it felt good to find these images and sort of figure out how they applied to my life [and use] it as a tool of self-awareness and reflection. . . As I was doing this, I thought 'wow, I've grown a lot, holy shit!'.

Jordan expressed that the imaginative element of the creative process was empowering for him. He commented, "it was awesome because I just had so many ideas; it was so easy to dream. I just had so many ideas of what I wish for and that felt really powerful".

Some participants expressed that it was initially hard for them to get into the process of doing the creative work. More than one participant divulged that they were avoiding or procrastinating starting the process. Once these participants overcame that initial challenge, many of them communicated that they enjoyed the process. Jordan spoke about overcoming his hesitations:

> I just get a little righteous when I'm doing art. I'm just really dismissive and jerky about it and [doing the project] was totally lovely. It was totally lovely, especially when I let go of my processes around it. I just have a big worry that I'm not quote/unquote "creative", and that I don't have anything imaginative to put down on the page but I very truly have my experiences and you don't know them. Yeah, then I did not care, and I was like 'yeah, whatever, I'm fucking drawing and it looks like it does'.

Beyond initial reluctance, some participants encountered challenging feelings and emotions while engaging in the creative process. Carter mentioned that doing the activities brought up

feelings of anger and that expressing negative experiences was really hard for him based on the fact that he has been socialized to always be positive and not to complain. He remarked, "yeah, I did not really like doing these activities (laughter). I did not have fun. I would prefer to be in my little bubble. I try not to think about this actually. I try not to think about it at all". Although Carter was challenged by doing the activities, he remarked, "I'm glad that I did it, I mean I wanted to contribute to this, I think it's important. It does make me kind of angry but better that we should talk about it than not. It's ok to be angry". Zoe also encountered some challenging feelings while doing the artwork. From these challenging feelings, she was able to find something positive. She mentioned, that though she was brought back to a "turbulent" and "difficult" time that she "did not think would ever end", from doing the activities, she saw how much she had grown. She stated, "hell, I'm way stronger now; I study social work. I have lots of friends; I'm volunteering, I did not know I would be this person now".

Many participants communicated that participating in the project was valuable because of the chance that it gave them to have their voices heard by others. Jordan articulated:

it was interesting to retell some of that story because the people that I tell here either

experienced it with me or kind of know this stuff so it's become commonplace but

rearticulating it for somebody who wasn't there made it feel unique and worth telling.

Elijah expressed that he hopes that "somebody who sees [his art] can be touched by it or affected by what [he's] created" and Zoe remarked, "I'm glad I was able to get my voice heard somewhere. That was really important to me".

Visual Response

As part of the analysis, I used a visual art process to enrich my understanding of the data. I have chosen to present one of the visual pieces that I developed out of my relationship to these findings overall. Please take a few moments to look at my work before reading my response:

Figure 10: Arkell's image: Visual response

For me, this piece helped me derive a global conceptualization of the experiences that participants shared in relation to identifying as transgender and studying social work. The imagery is meant to speak to the interplay between personal experiences and the structures of social work education. The flames at the bottom of the page are meant to represent the passion that was expressed by the participants in relation to their experiences. The fact that the flames are confined in boxes represents the sense of containment that some participants conveyed in relation to expressing their perspective. The middle section of the piece represents the current state of social work education. Though the discipline has a distinct and somewhat linear structure to it, there are many diverse layers that contribute to making up the whole. Though largely black and white and somewhat boxy there are some small and large bits of colour that exist within the middle section of the image. These bits of colour represent the progressive, positive aspects of social work. The colourful top represents participants' hopes for social work education in the future. The piece reads from the bottom up and the movement from the flames to the colourful end point shows that through creative self-expression we can create positive change.

Chapter Five: Discussion, Recommendations and Implications

Summary of Results

Many of the participants entered the field of social work because they aspired to be in a position where they could enact some sort of change in society and, in some cases, within the discipline of social work. Involvement in activism and community development as well as personal interaction with social services also influenced participants' decisions to enter the field. Many of the reasons participants shared for entering social work were in line with the discipline's value of the pursuit of social justice. Although all of the participants entered the field with a hope of using social work to make a difference, participants' perceptions of social work and their relationship to the discipline shifted throughout their experience of studying and working in the field; in many cases, participants expressed a sense of disappointment in the discipline's inability to meet their expectations.

Participants were personally impacted, both positively and negatively, by being trans while studying social work. For many participants, being the only trans person in their program or at their school had a great impact on their experiences. Some of the main challenges expressed as a consequence of being the only trans person in the program were facing fears of rejection, feeling lonely and isolated, and that they had to largely fight their own battles. Many participants felt they were frequently put in the position of educating others around trans issues. This evoked a variety of feelings that ranged from frustration to empowerment.

All of the participants had to grapple, on some level, with others' perceptions. Although these perceptions ranged from transphobic to supportive, the majority of the participants' experiences were challenging. Many participants experienced circumstances

where either their gender identity was directly discredited or trans people were devalued in general. Participants encountered transphobia at schools of social work from both students and faculty. Participants expressed complicated feelings and experiences surrounding 'passing' and being 'out' that were impacted by the way that they were treated.

In spite of encountering many challenges, participants found ways of coping with difficulties and exhibited great resilience. They found that support from those outside of their program contributed greatly to their ability to cope with the challenges of the program. Connection with others in queer and trans communities was identified as important by all participants. Finding solidarity with key individuals inside their social work programs was another important source of support. Beyond connecting with individuals, support was also found in certain ideas, practices and/or beliefs such as spirituality, and reading the work of radical trans academics.

Participants' reflections of their programs focused on the availability of trans friendly resources at their university, their perception of the social work environment, and the program's approach to trans issues. While resources available to trans students varied from university to university, it was identified that universities need to explicitly take into account trans needs in order to be accessible to trans students. Participants attributed a lack of exposure to trans issues by university administrators and the existence of policies and physical space that was not inclusive to trans students to some of the struggles they faced. Two participants reported attempts made by their universities to actively address trans needs.

Several participants reported that they experienced transphobia, homophobia, and racism specifically in the discipline of social work. Furthermore, the discipline did a poor job of addressing trans issues. The social work program's environment was often thought to be in

contrast or opposition with the discipline's guiding values and participants' expectations. According to most participants, the discipline did not expend nearly enough energy on trans issues and, when trans issues were mentioned, they were collapsed into issues of sexual identity and largely overlooked. This inadequate approach to trans issues in social work education concerned participants because it was thought to affect both trans students in the program as well as social workers' ability to serve trans clients.

Participants felt there were many specific areas which social work education could improve in order to address their concerns and criticisms of their programs. Many of the participants felt educators and social work students alike would benefit from further education on trans issues. Participants hoped that an increased dialogue about trans issues would result in a safer space for trans students in schools of social work, as well as prepare future clinicians for working with trans clients. When discussing trans issues, it was deemed important to represent the whole trans umbrella and not only those identities that ascribe to the binary gender system; however, it was also thought important to concentrate on the lived experiences of trans people rather than focusing solely on gender theory. Focusing primarily on theory was thought to potentially result in the dismissal of actual experiences, as well as make invisible those whose identities are based on the binary. In reference to this, Hansbury (2005) stated, "to argue against these identities, however, to dispel them completely by forever citing the exceptions and many permutations, is to render them—and the people who stand behind them—invisible. Somewhere in all the discussion, the individual is lost." (p. 242). Participants also felt that an increased emphasis on intersectionality in social work education was necessary in order to adequately understand trans issues. An intersectional approach acknowledges that different aspects of social class, such as race, gender, sexual

orientation, ability, etc., "intersect with each other to produce a complex pattern with specific effects influenced by a changing historical, political, and social context" (Lundy, 2004, p. 72). Being open and acknowledging one's prejudices, regarding trans issues and beyond, was also considered fundamental to the advancement of the discipline. Finally, an experiential approach to learning that reflects the discipline's practical nature was promoted as imperative for the discipline of social work.

When reflecting on the topic, participants found the dynamics between urban and rural environments to be complex and nuanced. Many participants felt that, although in major urban centres there are more supports and more trans peoples, these qualities don't necessarily make the cities an easier place. Some participants found that in large cities the trans community can be taken for granted. It was also pointed out that it can be easy for an individual coming to the city to feel lost in the crowd. Rural environments, on the other hand, were considered to have fewer formal supports and fewer trans/queer people. This was thought to make it a harder environment to navigate that required more focus on safety and getting by from day to day. In rural environments, however, it was felt that trans people were required to be reliant on the community that they did have and consequently were able to forge deeper connections with people.

Although some participants experienced challenges completing the art process, the majority felt doing the creative activities was valuable for them. Based on their experiences, some participants expressed feelings of anger, which they readily expressed during participation in the project. Stryker (1994) wrote about transgender rage and the necessity of rage in relation to transgender identification. She suggested "through the operation of rage, the stigma itself becomes the source of transformative power" (p.10). Many participants

expressed that being involved in the project allowed them the opportunity to process their experiences and negative feelings in a safe environment. The project also was thought to have given them the ability to move beyond the challenging experiences and to imagine positive alternatives. Participants found that retelling their stories in this manner both impacted their self-awareness and facilitated the cultivation of a feeling of worth that was derived from having their voices being heard and valued.

Recommendations

Although the scope of this project is limited and there are many concepts that have not been addressed or need greater attention, based on the insights gained from the findings of this research, there are several recommendations for social work education.

First, in order to make schools of social work more accessible for trans individuals, the discipline must work with the larger university communities in which they exist in order to ensure that the needs of trans students and faculty members are being met. Due to the fact that colleges and universities lack accurate knowledge, trans students and employees are often either isolated and ignored or face harassment (Sausa, 2002). According to Sausa, universities can work towards making campuses accessible to trans people by updating policies and forms, using appropriate language, creating a safe environment, establishing resources, increasing awareness and providing educational training. Although this list is far from exhaustive, here are some things that can be taken into consideration in the pursuit of making schools more accessible to trans students:

- Ensure that the option of gender-neutral washrooms, dorms and change rooms are available and accessible.

- Design all administrative forms and school-based surveys to reflect diverse genders.

- Ensure that those who are transitioning can easily navigate the process of making changes to all personal documents.

- Include gender identity in all anti-discrimination policies and have clear and accessible guidelines with regards to how these policies are implemented.

- Establish trans specific resources on campus; perhaps under the umbrella of existing Pride Centres.

- Ensure that support services that are not specifically geared towards trans individuals, such as counselling and learning skills centers, are welcoming to trans students. In order to achieve this, these services must actively indicate to students that they are knowledgeable, competent, and affirming of trans identities.

As Sausa (2002) put it:

Trans people are here. They are in our schools. They are students in our classrooms. They are the staff and faculty members with whom we work each day. They are our colleagues, our mentors, our friends. It is time to makes some changes in our schools (p. 53).

Having access to post-secondary education contributes to trans individuals' capacity to participate as meaningful members in the public arena. Furthermore, having trans voices in academia provides important perspectives. Making universities more accessible to trans individuals is mutually beneficial to both the trans and academic communities.

Many of the participants encountered transphobic or ignorant attitudes by students and faculty specifically within schools of social work. In order to make the discipline of social work a safe space for trans students, social work must not only work to make universities at large safe but also be open to challenge themselves as well. As such, schools

of social work must explicitly work towards ensuring that students and faculty have immediate exposure to enough information about trans issues to be able to treat trans people with a basic level of respect. Those within the discipline of social work must also be challenged to become aware of their feelings about gender identity and attitudes towards transgender individuals so that any negative attitudes or prejudices can be exposed and worked through. When reflecting on his experience, Elijah pointed out that he felt that lack of exposure to trans identities created an environment that was unwelcoming to trans people and suggested that an immediate exposure to trans issues when entering schools of social work may make the environment safer for trans people. He stressed that this was particularly important for social work because of the personal nature of the content in social work and the self-reflexive "sharing" that is required in many social work classes. Social work departments must not only work with the university to include gender identity within their anti-discrimination policies but schools of social work themselves, as Elijah put it, must adopt a zero tolerance approach to harassment that is made clear to all students, faculty, and staff members at the start of the program. Negative attitudes, misinformation, and discrimination towards trans people in social work not only creates challenges for trans students who enter the discipline (as expressed in the finding section), but also has the potential of discouraging trans people from entering the field and/or results in trans individuals' concealment of their identity when they do. One participant, Carter, explicitly mentioned that he did not divulge his trans status in social work classes because he did not feel safe. When trans people within the discipline are driven to conceal their identity because of the perception of a hostile, non-affirming environment, the discipline loses the gift of their

knowledge and experience on the subject and further distances itself from achieving the competence to practice with trans communities.

Though some may argue that the trans population is not significantly large enough to warrant explicit consideration in all areas of practice, the literature shows that the trans population is a marginalized population that is 'at risk' and, therefore, should demand the profession's attention. Furthermore, as Greatheart (2010) pointed out, "we need to recognize that we may find ourselves working with trans people as clients, co-workers or superiors in almost any setting and client population" (p. 103). Schools of social work, therefore, must be dedicated to preparing students to work with trans communities in a respectful and competent way. Armed with an understanding of trans identities, including an up to date grasp on the language used in trans communities and an affirming attitude, social workers must stand in opposition to the harmful stigmas prevalent in society and be prepared to present trans as a viable gender identity. In order to achieve this, all schools must make a commitment to educate students about trans issues rather than having trans issues addressed in accordance with the interests of individual students or faculty members.

Developing whole courses that are solely dedicated to the experiences of trans individuals may be useful for students who are interested in focusing on the transgender population and gaining a specialized knowledge about how to address issues that are specific to gender identity. For a number of reasons, however, offering a specialized course must not be the only attempt to incorporate trans materials in social work education. First, offering specialized courses may not be practical, especially in smaller schools, as they would rely upon interested and knowledgeable faculty and sufficient interest from the students. Special interest courses dedicated to trans experiences may also fall short in their account of how

trans identities intersect with other elements of social class. Most significantly, specialized courses leave social worker students who don't elect to take the course without any training on how to deal with the population. The trans population should not be treated as something outside of 'core' material that one can choose to study or choose to ignore. Integrating transgender focused materials across the entire social work curriculum must occur in addition to any specialized courses that are developed on the subject.

A major reason that a basic competence of working with members of trans communities must be included throughout the discipline of social work is that social workers may encounter trans individuals in all practice settings. There are many instances in which trans people need support that does not directly relate to their gender identity. Even when gender is not the presenting issue when seeking services, being trans still may affect a person's experience. Hansbury (2005) reported that when accessing counselling services, "many trans people will have fears about sharing their trans identities and stories with someone who is not trans and who may not only misunderstand trans clients, but also mistreat them" (p. 262). Seeking help from clinicians who are not knowledgeable about trans issues may not just be unhelpful, it can be harmful. For example, as Bauer et al. (2009) reported, mental health providers may conflate unrelated mental health issues with a tran's person's gender identity, which can result in inadequate or inappropriate care. Having negative experiences and receiving inconsistent treatment can lead to a variety of barriers in accessing health and social services that are readily available to the general population (i.e. Erich et al., 2007). As Greatheart (2010) put it, "a trans man seeking medical attention for a broken arm may not require different medical treatment, but may still experience anxiety from the anticipation of being differently treated by health-care providers, even if this does

not actually happen" (p. 104). With this in mind, the discipline of social work must have a basic knowledge and understanding of how to address trans individuals and strive towards creating spaces in health-care and social services that are visibly supportive of the trans communities. Greatheart (2010) stated, "by providing an environment where trans clients are welcomed respectfully and appropriately treated, we can help alleviate this anxiety" (p.104).

It is the task of schools of social work to help create this environment. Erich el al. (2007) found that exposure to educational content regarding trans communities not only increased social workers' knowledge but also their comfort level in working with trans people. The trans individuals consulted in this project strongly reported that they felt that the discipline was falling dramatically short of providing education around trans issues. They indicated both a lack of information and misinformation regarding trans communities in their programs. Schools of social work must be accountable for providing students with the knowledge, values, and skills to work with diverse populations. Transgender issues, as Carter recommended, must, therefore, be incorporated into the CASWE so that future social workers are ensured to achieve an appropriate level of trans competency, regardless of what school they attended.

Social workers stand to improve their practice by valuing and celebrating trans voices. Trans individuals are in the best position to give insights into their situation and construct solutions for their struggles. Participants' experiences, however, suggest that trans voices are largely silenced in social work. Carter, for example, felt that the best that can happen when one comes out as trans "is that someone could be neutral" but, generally, he felt that the discipline would prefer that he was silent about the issue. Schools of social work must strive to create an environment where trans perspectives are valued, not simply

tolerated. This would require an affirming rather than pathologizing perspective. Actively valuing trans voices not only serves to affirm trans students and faculty, but also lends important knowledge about trans experiences that can be related to social work practice with the population. As Zoe put it, it's a shame that trans voices are not well represented because social workers "would benefit from the expertise that our community has to offer". Social work can actively indicate that they value trans voices by incorporating materials that have been created by trans people. Incorporating readings by trans authors such as Dean Spade, Vivian Namaste, Susan Stryker, Kate Bornstein, Krista Scott-Dixon, and Bear S. Bergman would be a start. The film "Diagnosing Difference" that highlights a diversity of trans affirming perspectives, is another way of presenting a trans perspective (Ophelian, 2009). Establishing an environment where trans identities are affirmed and materials by trans academics are highlighted may also take some of the pressure off trans students to persistently have to be the educator. Many of the participants expressed not wanting to be responsible for educating others about trans issues but felt that it was necessary to speak up in order to counteract discrimination. Trans students should have their perspectives valued but not be put in a position where they are consistently obliged to educate about others. If trans voices were valued and a basic knowledge about trans identities established than trans students, faculty, and professionals might be more comfortable sharing their insights.

In order to have an encompassing understanding of trans issues, all schools of social work must embrace a progressive social justice, anti-oppressive framework that adopts an intersectional approach to understanding oppression. To start, social work education needs to become more consistent with the value of the pursuit of social justice as stated in the CASW *Code of Ethics*:

> Social workers believe in the obligation of people, individually and collectively, to
> provide resources, services and opportunities for the overall benefit of humanity and
> to afford them protection from harm. Social workers promote social fairness and the
> equitable distribution of resources, and act to reduce barriers and expand choice for
> all persons, with special regard for those who are marginalized, disadvantaged,
> vulnerable, and/or have exceptional needs. Social workers oppose prejudice and
> discrimination against any person or group of persons, on any grounds, and
> specifically challenge views and actions that stereotype particular persons or groups.
> (p. 5).

I agree with Elijah's statement, "because social work believes in value and dignity for all people, we have to call social work faculties to the task of upholding human rights in regards to trans folk. There should be NO exception". Harris (2006) pointed out, "a social justice framework requires the willingness to challenge the status quo, and to address the hegemony that predominates" (p. 254). In relation to trans issues, among other things, this entails breaking down assumptions that everyone's gender naturally matches what they were assigned at birth (cisnormativity) and understanding the privilege and legitimacy given to those who are perceived as 'normal' men and women. As Serano (2007) argued, this assumption is an active process that makes trans experiences and people invisible. Schools of social work must be conscious of the ways in which they promote cisnormativity in both a passive and active capacity. For example, not identifying trans participants in all social work research can contribute to cisnormativity. As Bauer et al. (2009) reported:

> Health research commonly does not allow for identification of trans participants or

address questions relevant to trans communities. It often erroneously presumes that all research participants are cissexual, and that their sex and gender have been consistent over the lifetime. Thus, trans people have been systematically erased, and by extension, trans experiences and subjectivity have been similarly rendered invisible. (p. 352)

In order for social workers to actively uphold their value of social justice in relation to the trans community, we need to address trans erasure and understand the impact that this erasure has on trans people's ability to equitably participate in society.

Having a foundation of progressive social work values was consistently communicated by participants as imperative in relation to understanding trans issues. Participants' reflections, however, indicated an inconsistency between different schools with regards to the existence of this theoretical framework. An intersectional approach is particularly important in the context of social work when conceptualizing gender. As Scott-Dixon (2006) stated, other factors can have a significant influence on how gender is experienced:

Focusing on trans people alone as the subject of study does not capture the ways in which even normatively gendered people might support or subvert gender roles and regimes. The privilege of being 'perfectly' gendered is also racialized, classed and shaped by other elements of social location, such as age, ability and sexuality, all of which affect how we perceive our gender and how others perceive us. (p. 18)

Furthermore, to echo participants' words, if we don't take other factors, such as race, into consideration when thinking about trans issues, then we could be missing a significant part of the picture. For example, trans women of colour experience disproportionately high rates of

violence and trans youth from ethnic minorities are at higher risk of contracting HIV (Garofalo, Deleon, Osmer, Doll, & Harper, 2006). Participants specifically identified the need to address the continued impacts of colonialism in relation to the discipline. Without taking an intersectional approach, focusing solely on trans issues could make invisible other aspects of social class and reify oppressive norms.

When conceptualizing gender, it is also important that schools of social work expand their discussion of gender to include trans identities in a way that acknowledges the legitimacy of both binary and non-binary identities and highlights the actual experiences, both struggles and strengths, of trans individuals. This entails promoting a gender theory that recognizes the existence of more than two genders but does not discredit those trans people who feel most comfortable existing in the binary. The way to do this, as Elijah recommended, is

> just be sensitive to the fact that gender is a continuum. Not everybody even identifies as a specific gender. It's important not to alienate anybody in our conversations about gender. It's really important to take the extra five seconds or the extra half an hour to talk about the whole spectrum, not just trans people who chose to be on hormones, for example, not just trans people who are opting for surgery or who are just pre-op, or even who identify as one or the other. Just be inclusive.

It is important for the discipline of social work to promote this understanding of gender in their profession so that everyone's needs are met. The Trans PULSE program (2011) pointed out that using gender for classification purposes creates barriers in use, especially when attempting to access gendered services such as shelters, and sexual assault

centres. "Supports for those identifying as genderqueer, for example, need to be in place to allow for equitable access to services" (p.2).

One way that the discipline of social work can work towards pursuing social justice is through promoting policies and legislation that is equitable to transgender communities. Lobbying alongside transgender communities to include transgender rights in human rights legislation is one way that the discipline of social work can actively pursue their value of social justice. As Bauer (2009) pointed out, "there are few jurisdictions where basic human rights protections for trans people exist and even fewer where they are enforced" (p.349). Given that trans people are at risk of employment discrimination and lack equitable access to housing and health care (Kaufman, 2008), explicit legislation protecting their rights is invaluable. In light of this, transgender activists and allies throughout the country have been lobbying both provincial and federal governments to explicitly include transgender rights in human rights legislation. Clements-Noelle, Marx, and Katz (2006) reported:

> The high prevalence of gender-based prejudice experienced by MTF and FTM
>
> transgender persons in our study and its association with attempted suicide suggest an
>
> immediate need for strategies to increase societal acceptance of transgender
>
> populations. Such efforts should include the addition of gender identity to all
>
> legislation that protects sexual minority populations from discrimination and
>
> hate crimes as such legislation appears to have had an impact on the suicide
>
> rates. (pp. 64-65)

As trusted professionals and 'experts', social workers must publicly show their support for such causes.

In many cases, social workers are responsible for policy and program development and have the direct power to impact systemic discrimination faced by trans individuals. Given the aforementioned barriers to accessing services, policies that accommodate trans identities are necessary in all health and social service environments. Bauer (2009) pointed out, "the possibility of trans identities can be excluded from the outset in bureaucratic applications such as texts and forms. This is most often apparent on referral forms, administrative intake forms, prescriptions, and other documents" (p. 354). Schools of social work must provide students with the ability to acknowledge shortcomings and create structures that are more inclusive within the configurations of health and social services, beginning with application forms and other administration forms students are required to fill out.

The adoption of a philosophy that affirms trans identities and looks at these identities in a non-pathologizing way is also an important step that the discipline of social work must take in addressing trans issues. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) in the United States has taken the public stance that gender identity should not be considered a mental health diagnosis and should be removed from the DSM. The NASW (2012) commented that "continuing to include the diagnoses in the DSM contributes to the sustained oppression of a marginalized group. In fact, doing so has a particularly potent and pernicious effect given the esteemed and authoritative nature of the DSM, and its pervasive use" (Gender Identity Disorder and the DSM section, para. 3). No statements or publications could be found on the CASW, BCASW or CASWE's position on this issue. In order to be able to offer an affirming, safe environment for trans students, workers, and clients, social worker associations in Canada need to make their perspectives known.

Finally, the discipline would benefit from further exploration of alternative pedagogy and practice approaches, including opportunities to engage in artistic practices. Given the response from participants in relation to the benefits that they derived from the arts-based methods, it is evident that social work needs to make space for creative expression and critical imagination. It is, furthermore, important to explore diverse approaches to pedagogy because, in the process of trying to impact social change, social workers in the field may find themselves playing an 'educator' as well as the 'learner' role. As Freire (1990) pointed out:

> Social work practice, whether casework, group work, or community organization, is inherently and substantively educational-pedagogical. There is a particular pedagogy natural to social work where the social worker is the forefront in the search for a clearer understanding in coming to know certain subject matter. (As cited in Carroll and Minkler, 2000, pp. 27-28)

The experiences that social work students have in schools of social work, therefore, carry into their practice.

In summary, the following recommendations were derived from this project:

1. Social work must work with universities to ensure that campuses are accessible to trans students.

2. Schools of social work must move towards making their own discipline safe and accessible to trans students.

3. Social work education must prepare future social workers to work with, alongside, or under trans individuals in all practice settings. Trans issues, therefore, must be considered a generalist concern, rather than specialized knowledge.

4. Social work education must make an effort to show that it values trans voices by including relevant materials by trans academics.

5. Social work must uphold its value of the pursuit of social justice in regards to trans communities. This necessitates that schools of social work address trans erasure.

6. All schools of social work must embrace a progressive social justice, anti-oppressive framework that adopts an intersectional approach to understanding oppression.

7. Associations of Social Work in Canada must publically take a stance that is affirming of transgender identities.

8. Social work schools must explore alternative pedagogy and practice methods that allow for creative expression and critical imagination.

Future Directions

Social work educators must be willing to further explore and engage with the ideas put forth in this project, both within the classroom and through research. Further research into social work education with regards to trans issues is needed in order to advance the field to a place where it is inclusive of gender diversity and students are prepared to serve trans communities. An in depth content analysis of social work curriculum with trans issues in mind would be useful in explicitly identifying the areas in which trans content could be incorporated. This analysis would also function to uncover the ways in which social work education reifies sex roles and gender norms. By having a better understanding of the materials that are used in social work education, insights into how and where trans content is relevant can be explicitly identified. Research into social work pedagogy would also be

useful in identifying specific teaching methods that are useful in establishing the knowledge base necessary for trans inclusivity in the discipline.

Although assessing the resources available to direct social workers to work with the transgender population was not within the scope of this project, through reviewing the literature on the subject I gained insights into some of the areas that need particular attention and could use some further research. In spite of the fact that I found some important resources available on service provision to the transgender population (i.e. Lev, 2004, Mallon, 2009, The Transgender Health Program,) there are still significant gaps in the literature as to how to meet trans needs in health care and social services environments. One area that requires more attention is transgender seniors. Persson (2009) found that transgender elders are not only underserved but also understudied and mentioned that we need to better understand mental health and substance abuse issues, the role of the family and social networks, and how to identify and prevent abuse in this population. Another area that needs attention is the transgender population in rural and remote environments. Although I found a general acknowledgment of potential barriers to accessing health care in rural environments faced by trans individuals (Goldber et. al, 2006 & Lev, 2004) and some research that addressed the rural LGBT experience (but did not explicitly address trans population; Lindhorst, 1998, & Mancoske, 1997), I could not find any specific research on the unique needs and experiences of trans individuals in rural environments. Research into transgender experiences in rural and remote environments and the development of education programs that sensitize rural and remote social service and health care providers to trans needs are necessary.

Here in British Columbia, the discipline of social work needs to address the lack of

supports and specific policies regarding transgender youth in the child welfare system.

Holman and Goldberg (2006) suggested that transgender youth in care in British Columbia

face risks to safety and privacy, and are at an increased risk of abuse and violence from group

home workers, foster parents, and peers. They also reported that there is an inconsistency in

the Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD) in relation to practice with

transgender youth; while some workers they encountered were caring, conscientious, and

trans-positive, others were actively transphobic (Holman & Goldberg, 2006). Having

universal guidelines for MCFD and other provincial-level organizations will give social

workers in these fields some guidance on how to approach transgender care, which may be

helpful if they have not encountered transgender individuals before. Developing such policies

would also contribute to the social work discipline's acknowledgment of the existence of

transgender identities.

Final remarks

In order for social workers to create the transgender affirming environment needed

for the healthy development of transgender individuals and communities, the discipline of

social work must fundamentally familiarize itself with transgender identities and struggles.

As Burdge (2007) put it, "ending gender oppression to help transgender people is analogous

to finding structural solutions to eliminating poverty, rather than trying to help individual

poor people cope with their unfortunate plight in a hostile environment" (p. 247). Social

workers must take a stance and stand up for a gender equality that is inclusive of all gender

identities, including those that transgress gender norms. Although this project has shown that

the discipline of social work has a long way to go with the trans population before it is in line

with some of its proposed values, there is also some positive movement and a great deal of hope. The individuals who participated in this project, for example, were a source of inspiration and I am confident that their/our visions for the future of the discipline can be actualized one day.

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Appendix A: Ethics Approval Letter

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD

MEMORANDUM

To:	Aislinn Wiley
CC:	Indrani Margolin
From:	Henry Harder, Chair Research Ethics Board
Date:	May 4, 2011
Re:	E2011.0512.053.00 Qualitative Arts-Based Inquiry into Transgender Experiences in Social Work Education

Thank you for submitting the above-noted proposal and requested amendments to the Research Ethics Board. Your proposal has now been approved.

We are pleased to issue approval for the above named study for a period of 12 months from the date of this letter. Continuation beyond that date will require further review and renewal of REB approval. Any changes or amendments to the protocol or consent form must be approved by the Research Ethics Board.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Henry Harder

Appendix B: Letters of advertisement

Initial Letter:

Hello,

I would like to inform you of an exciting new project that aims to highlight transgender perspectives in social work education through art.

My name is Arkell Wiley and I am a master in social work student at the University of Northern British Columbia. For the purpose of this project, I am seeking the knowledge and experiences of trans identified individuals who have studied, or are currently studying, social work at a Canadian university. Please see attached poster for details.

Because I am currently living in a Northern British Columbia it is difficult for me to personally connect with organizations in order to get the message about this project out. Therefore, I would highly appreciate any way that you could help me spread the word (by putting up my poster,
forwarding this e-mail, telling your friends and colleagues, etc.).

This project is very important for me not only because it is part of my studies but because it strives to initiate a much needed dialogue about how to increase awareness and acceptance of gender diversity within the discipline of social work.

If you are interested in more information or participating in this project please contact me at wileya@unbc.ca or 250-208-7368.

Regards,

Arkell Wiley

Follow Up Letter:

Greetings,

This is a follow-up email to let you know that this project on transgender experiences in social work education is UNBC ethics approved and that my supervisor is Dr. Indrani Margolin (margolin@Unbc.ca). Please feel free to contact her.

For your convenience I have also updated and reattached the poster.

Thank-you,

Arkell Wiley

Appendix C: Advertisement Poster

Highlighting trans Perspectives in social work education through art

This MSW project seeks the knowledge and experiences of trans people who have studied Social Work at a Canadian university within the past 10 years.

Participants will be asked to:

- Complete 3-5 art-based activities (mailed to them by the researcher) that explore their experiences in social work education.

- Do one 60-90 minute phone/videoconference interview about their experiences and artwork.

    Note: No prior artistic experience is needed. Current students welcome!

If you are interested in more information about the project, please contact **Arkell** (Aislinn) **Wiley** at **wileya@unbc.ca** or **(250)-561-0141**.

(This project is UNBC ethics approved. Supervisor: Indrani Margolin at margolin@unbc.c)

Appendix D: Project Information Sheet

Graduate Student Thesis Researcher: (Arkell) Aislinn Wiley, Masters of Social Work, Social Work Program.
c/o University of Northern British Columbia, School of Social Work,
3333 University Way, Prince George, B.C. V2N 4Z9
Home Phone 250-561-0141 Cell Phone: 250-208-7368 E-mail: wileya@unbc.ca

Thesis Title: Qualitative arts-based inquiry into transgender experiences in social work education.

Supervisor: Dr. Indrani Margolin Assistant Professor, Social Work UNBC

Purpose of the Research:

This study aims to explore the experiences of individuals who identify as transgender and have studied social work. By eliciting transgender (trans) perspectives on social work education, this research hopes to make visible elements of trans identities within social work and strives to initiate a dialogue about how to increase awareness and acceptance of gender diversity within the discipline. By highlighting expressions of transgender subjectivities, this research also aims to destabilize the dominant discourses that oppress transgender individuals. Finally, this research aspires to give participants the opportunity to reflect on what their experiences in social work education means to them. `

How respondent will be chosen:

A purposive sampling method will be used where subjects are selected based on their self-identification as transgender and their attendance to a school of social work at an accredited university within the past ten years. Participants are not required to have finished a degree at the time of participation.

Respondents will be asked to:

- Set up an initial phone/videoconference meeting with the researcher to discuss and ask questions about the research.
- Sign and mail an informed consent form to (postage provided by researcher).
- Do three to five arts-based activities.
- Participate in a 60-90min phone/videoconference semi-structured interview about their artwork and their experiences in social work education.
- Mail their artwork to the researcher (postage provided by researcher).
- Be willing to follow-up with the researcher if any clarification is necessary.

Potential benefits and risks to participants:

Potential Benefits:

- This research will aim to highlight trans perspectives in social work education. This process may have the effect of increasing trans visibility within the discipline of social work.
- This research will invite participants to do artwork that is inspired by their experiences. For some individuals, engaging in artwork can be a transformative process that evokes self-reflection. Furthermore, artistic representations of experiences may entice viewers (researchers, readers, educators, and participants themselves) to see things from a different position.
- Through this research, participants will be invited to connect with a critical imagination where they express articulations of hope. These articulations of hope may be beneficial for everyone involved in the research (participants, researcher, reader, etc.).
- Upon request, participants will receive an electronic copy of the research when it is completed.

Note: Participants will receive either a gift card for a book worth 20$ or a home-made gift as a token of appreciation for participating in this research. This will be given to participants regardless of whether they withdraw or not.

Potential Risks:

- This research requests that participants share their personal experiences in social work education. Recounting experiences, especially challenging ones, may be distressing. The participant has the right to refuse to answer any questions without explanation. Furthermore, the researcher will be ready to stop the interview immediately upon request and is prepared to help locate appropriate supports for participants if, for whatever reason, the study is unsettling.

- Within an academic culture that is focused on evaluation, expressing oneself creatively may evoke a sense of vulnerability for participants. **The artwork that the participants are invited to engage in will function as an entrance into exploring their experiences and will not be critiqued or judged by the researcher for its content or aesthetic value.**

- In spite of efforts made by the researcher, the representational form in which the research is presented may not completely reflect the experiences of the participants or represent the diversity of the transgender community at large.

- When sharing personal information, confidentiality can be of great concern. Measures will be taken, therefore, to ensure participants' confidentiality and anonymity. Throughout the study, all data will be labeled with a pseudonym of the participants' choosing and kept in a secure location, apart from any identifying information. Once participants have completed their participation, they will be given the choice, specified in writing, as to whether or not they want their real names to be published. Participants will be given this choice in order to respect both confidentiality and the desire to give credit to participants for their contribution.

- Only the researcher and his supervisory committee, which consists of three UNBC professors, will have access to participants' information; all of whom are obligated to respect confidentiality.

- This research project is part of the requirements for the completion of the researcher's Masters of Social Work degree and will be published as a thesis. There is also the possibility that the study will be used in other scholarly capacities; if there are any elements of the research that participants do not want included in any type of publication or presentations, the information will be removed.

If participants have any other concerns, at any point throughout the process, they are welcome to contact the researcher. Furthermore, **participants can choose to withdraw at any time, without any consequences.**

Thank-you for considering participating in this research. **If, after having read this information sheet, you remain interested, please contact Arkell at wileya@unbc.ca or 250-208-7368 to set up an initial discussion.** This initial (unrecorded) discussion will be a chance for the researcher and participant to connect and discuss any queries/concerns about the research. Participants are encouraged to contact Arkell if they require any additional information at any time before, during, or after the study. The student researcher's supervisor, Dr. Indrani Margolin may also be contacted with regards to the research. You can contact her by email at margolin@unbc.ca or phone 250-960-6437.

Any complaints about the research project should be made to the Office of Research, University of Northern British Columbia, 250-960-6735, or by email at reb@unbc.ca.

Appendix E: Research Informed Consent

Informed Consent

I understand that (Arkell) Aislinn Wiley, who is a graduate student in the Master of Social Work program at the University of Northern British Columbia, is conducting a research project on transgender experiences in social work education.

I understand that the purpose of this research project is to explore transgender perspectives in social work education and initiate a dialogue about how to increase awareness and acceptance of transgender subjectivities within the discipline of social work.

I understand that I am agreeing to participate in this study.

I have received a copy of the Project Information Sheet and have read its contents.

I have had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study with the researcher.

I understand that, with my permission, conversations will be securely recorded and transcribed and that all identifying information will be removed.

I understand the benefits and risks involved in participating in this study.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and I can withdraw from the study at any time. I also understand that I have the right to refuse to do any activities, answer any questions or withdraw any information I do not wish to have included in the study.

I understand that the researcher is obliged to maintain my confidentiality and that only the student researcher and supervisory committee (consisting of three UNBC professors) will have access to any identifying information about me. I understand that confidentialy will be broken, as required by law, if child abuse is divulged, if suicide or homicide is suspected, or if subpoenaed by a Court. I agree to let the researcher use my artwork in their project.

I understand that if I have any comments or concerns about the research, I can contact the UNBC Office of Research at 250.960.6735 or email at reb@unbc.ca.

Thank you for considering involvement in this research. If you choose to participate, please sign below and enclose this form in the envelope provided.

PARTICIPANT:

    Name:_____ Signature _____ Date_____

RESEARCHER:

    Name:_____ Signature _____ Date_____