

Outline of Study:

Exploring the Effectiveness and Impact of the MHSAA 'Policy on Transgender Athletes':

Learning from the Experiences of Trans- Youth in Manitoba High Schools

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Jaxon Rae Hutton, MA Thesis Outline

Summary of Project:

This project intends to begin research on the lived experiences of trans- and gender variant (hereafter trans-) youth in physical activity and sport contexts in Manitoba high schools, and to assess the impact of high school athletic policies that directly implicate trans- youth such as the Manitoba High Schools Athletic Association's one sentence 'Policy on Transgender Athletes.' The overall objective of this research project is to provide space for trans- youth in Manitoba high schools to voice their experiences in sport, to better understand Manitoba athletic policies that center trans- youth, and to share ethics and values based recommendations and strategies directly from trans- youth in order to more adequately inform policy development.

Valuing the lived experiences of trans- youth is important because it can directly inform how schools in Manitoba can better support and encourage the inclusive participation of all athletes. Thus, the research questions driving this thesis are: 1) how do trans- youth in Manitoba navigate and experience high school sports, and 2) what, if any, are the impacts of the new policy for trans- youth? All data will inform my Master's thesis and will contribute to potential presentations, publications, and reports for sport governing bodies.

This research study adopts a queer-feminist qualitative methodology and research design, is grounded in a relationship-based approach, and will employ different methods of interviews. Semi-structured interviews with stakeholders involved in the creation and implementation of the policy will be conducted. Centering the voices and experiences of trans- youth will be ensured through the use of a hybrid combination of interactive and semi-structured interviews. A relationship-based approach minimizes power imbalances between the participants and myself as the researcher, as we come into "communal contact" (Lincoln, 2002, p. 331) through interaction and the sharing of experiences.

Since obtaining ethics approval from the University of Manitoba's Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB), data collection has begun in the form of semi-structured interviews with stakeholders involved in the creation and implementation of the MHSAA policy (MHSAA, Rainbow Resource Centre, The 519) in order to gather its history and contextualize the policy. Assistance to distribute a recruitment poster through email and mail connections to athletes involved in high school sport teams across Manitoba has been requested to the MHSAA Executive Director.

Second, letters of invitation have been sent to superintendents in Winnipeg and rural locations describing the study's aim to directly benefit trans- students, and the intention to provide a final report for superintendents, principals, and the MHSAA detailing themes, strategies, and recommendations from trans- youth. This letter requested approval to conduct the study within their division and for assistance in sharing this information with GSA faculty advisors in order for advisors to express their potential interest (as well as students' potential interest) in having me come and spend time at their GSA. GSA advisors will contact me directly with any interest.

Data with trans- youth will be collected in the form of interactive semi-structured interviews, a method to gain intimate understanding of experiences that may be viewed as "emotionally charged and sensitive" while providing a relational component of support through promotion of dialogue rather than interrogation (Ellis et al., 1997). Trans- youth will reach out to myself or their GSA faculty advisor with potential participation interest and will not be pressured to participate. If youth agree to participate, an interactive semi-structured interview will be

scheduled in person during a communal meet at a GSA group, by email, phone, or text (depending on the student's preference) to take place at a collaboratively decided upon time and safe location (e.g. GSA space and/or walking around the schoolyard together). After each interactive interview, I will reflect in a researcher journal.

Interviews with stakeholders and trans- youth will be transcribed verbatim by myself after signing a transcriptionist oath of confidentiality, an additional method to ensure to the best of my abilities the protection and confidentiality of all participants involved. All participants will have the option to review the document, make changes, clarify comments, and add/delete information. All interviews will be coded using qualitative research techniques and triangulated with a brief feminist media analysis of responses to the MHSAA policy since its enactment.

Participants:

This study initially sought to interview 2-3 stakeholders. At this time, three interviews have been conducted with stakeholders. During these interviews, additional stakeholder names have been provided. I intend to contact additional stakeholders to share information of the project and welcome them to contact me if they have interest in participating in the conversation.

This study seeks to conduct interactive semi-structured interviews with approximately 10-12 trans- youth. In relation to youth participants, the term trans- is used as a term that recognizes and celebrates multiple gender identities outside of binary constructions of man/woman: the term 'trans-' is a spatial marker of possibility that signifies transgressions of established norms and the possibility to reside somewhere within, outside of, or beyond the gender binary (Bhanji, 2013). This term includes youth who self-identify their gender on the spectrums of trans-, gender variant, gender non-conforming, gender diverse, gender independent, gender creative, non-binary and/or gender identity labels outside of Eurocentric conceptions such as Two-Spirit, Hijra, and Mak Nyah, all of whom may participate in this study. There may be transgressive gender identity labels that youth self-identify as that are not included in this list.

The identity labels that participants use to describe themselves will be used individually for each participant in order to respect their identity, while the term trans- will be used to speak of trans- people more generally. Narrowing the criteria only to youth who identify as "transgender" or "trans" would exclude a great majority of students who identify their gender outside of binary gender labels, and who may share similar experiences within high school sport. Using broader criteria of "transgressive" gender allows for important information to be gathered about many gender identity labels and youths' experiences and perception of high school sport in Manitoba.

Trans- youth participating in this study may choose to participate in sport or not, live in either rural or urban locations, and be enrolled in a Manitoba high school. The age of youth will vary between approximately 16-18 years of age depending on grade level and grade repetition.

Participation is voluntary and both stakeholders and youth may opt to discontinue participation at any point throughout the study should they feel uncomfortable with the study, without penalty, by informing myself in person, by e-mail or telephone. Youth who may not be comfortable informing me of their discontinuance directly may share their decision to discontinue participation to a faculty advisor who will then share this information with me.

Participation of Minors:

Trans- youth participating in this study will most often be minors aged approximately 16-18. Responsible research requires including trans- youth as participants and not assuming adults can

speak for them for several reasons:

1. The MHSAA 'Policy on Transgender Athletes' was enacted relatively recently. The extent to which this policy is upheld, enforced, and/or monitored, in high schools across Manitoba, as well as whether or not the current MHSAA structure is making an impact or meeting the needs of, and protection for, trans- youth is unknown;
2. Adults' reflections on their experiences from their youth are not directly applicable to the current context and policy, and may include memory effects (McManus, 2003; Pilkington & D'Augelli, 1995; Taylor, 2008). Avoiding the inclusion of trans- youth will lead to a poor understanding of their current experiences and potential impacts of the MHSAA policy that directly apply to trans- youth, as the policy has been in place for only one and a half years;
3. It is important and necessary to compile firsthand experiences of current trans- students in order to begin understanding the effectiveness and impact of the MHSAA policy on the lives of those directly affected, and to provide space for these experiences to be heard. Including trans- youth in research advances commitments to justice in research (TCPS2, 2010, p. 49) by improving knowledge of, and ability to respond to, the unique needs of trans- youth throughout their development and participation in Manitoba high schools.

Mature Minors:

The use of the term 'mature minor' refers to youth who are allowed to "give consent on their own behalf for involvement in research" (Iltis, 2013, p. 337) for a variety of reasons. One reason to use 'mature minor' is the lack of parental support for trans- and gender minority youth, where youth can be "considered mature minors who may provide their own consent if they can understand the treatment being proposed and its risks" (Taylor, 2008, p. 38). Offering 'mature minor' for trans- youth has been successfully included in research designs and studies conducted across Canada by Dr. Catherine Taylor (2008, 2011) at the University of Winnipeg and Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA), understanding that "[y]outh who live with their parents (or legal guardians or in state care) but do not have a caregiver who supports their transgender identity and who are de facto responsible for their own well- being in this regard" (p. 45) can be recognized as able to provide self-consent.

Taylor (2008) and Taylor et al.'s (2011) inclusion of 'mature minor' was supported by literature rationalizing that "[r]equiring transgender youth to provide proof of parental consent would, in the majority of cases, amount to asking them to put themselves in harm's way in order to participate" (p. 45).

Providing the option for trans- youth to declare themselves as mature minors by waiving parental consent requirements in cases where youth report having no supportive parent or legal guardian resulted in this being the largest group in Taylor's (2008, 2011) study. The inclusion of 'mature minors' aids in ensuring to the greatest extent possible that trans- youth are included in research studies that directly involve and center them, recognizing that although TCPS2 (2010) carefully points out that children "may," not do, lack decision-making capacity, it is necessary that third-party consent is required only when children lack the relevant capacity.

Trans- youth who are managing their trans- identity in the face of parental opposition or hostility are de facto demonstrating their capacity to make decisions for themselves in their own best interest. As Taylor (2008) notes, it is "possible that some [trans-] youth are more pessimistic than is warranted about their parents' attitude, thus needlessly cutting their parents out of the consent procedure. We couched that concession, however, with reports of reactions to disclosure,

indicating that youth are far more likely to be unduly optimistic about their parents' attitude [...] Ultimately then, [...] the decision to disclose [one's felt and/or lived gender identity] is a life-altering one that should not be a universal requirement of participating in such a study" (p. 49).

Informed Consent:

Stakeholders involved in the creation of the MHSAA policy are required to provide informed consent by reading and signing an informed consent form before the interview is conducted. The Stakeholder Informed Consent Form has been sent to participants by email prior to interviews being conducted and includes an outline of the study that informs the participant of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Interview times and locations have been scheduled over email or phone to accommodate the participant's preference.

Trans- youth whose parents or legal guardians accept and support their trans- identity will be asked to seek parental consent (or the consent of their legal guardian or primary caregiver). Trans- youth in this situation will themselves be asked to then sign an Assent Form. Trans- youth who live with their parents (or primary caregiver or legal guardians) but do not have a supportive parent or legal guardian who support their trans- identity will be deemed 'mature minors' and will be asked to read and review an Informed Consent Form for Mature Minors. I have requested that ethics waive parental consent requirements for participants who lack a supportive parent or guardian to ensure to the greatest extent possible that youth who lack parental support of their trans- identity and who wish to participate in the study are not put in harm's way, a request which they have approved. All trans- youth participants will either gain parental consent and provide their individual assent to participate, or they will self-consent and provide their own informed consent to participate.

Upon hearing from and/or meeting potential youth participants (within GSAs, for example), I will ask if they would like me to send by email or share with them in person an informed consent form for them to view further details about the study. This will provide youth with an outline of the study and inform them of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. At the beginning of each interactive semi-structured interview, after greeting youth and engaging in small chat to relieve any tension about the interactive interview process, I will ask whether or not they have read the informed consent form, if they have any questions about the information contained within the informed consent form, and if they are willing to participate. I will then ask if they have obtained parental consent to participate in the study or if they will be self-consenting to participate. At this point, after all questions, comments, and concerns are clarified, youth can provide their informed consent forms. After the informed consent form is signed and when youth feel comfortable beginning the interactive semi-structured interview, the interview will begin. All interviews and subsequent transcripts will be used in my analysis to address the research questions noted above.

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