

He/Her

Unravelling the Social Factors Behind the Rapidly Rising Adolescent Transgender Rates



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Introduction

Adolescent transgender identity rates have exponentially increased in recent years, which has sparked discussions and research on the potential underlying social elements causing the phenomena. Researchers, legislators, and the media are becoming increasingly captivated in the study of transgender rates among teenagers. This surge prompts a critical examination of the complex interplay between societal norms, cultural shifts, psychological factors, and individual experiences that may influence the new social contagion of excessive inclusion and gender dysphoria in adolescents.

The average person may see no need for this investigation. I am here to argue the opposite, with the first-hand experience of the impact on families with transitioning children. To be able to understand and support transgender youth is not only for their individual well-being or even their meso world of the impact on loved ones and community but the extreme implications for modern society that has been irrevocably reshaped. When children and adolescents make permanent changes to their bodies, it profoundly affects their mental and physical health. Without adequate support and informed decisions, there is the risk of irreversible physical consequences that could lead to immense regret.

This research paper will consider the social variables that have contributed to the precipitous rise in the rates of teenage transgender people, emphasising the complexity of this phenomenon and its implications for individuals and society. This project will employ a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research methods to explore the multifaceted nature of social factors influencing adolescents. Secondary research including journals, articles, and books has allowed me to obtain extensive knowledge and an objective understanding of the topic, adding a rich qualitative layer to my Personal Interest Project (PIP). This prompted me to come to my hypothesis that the dramatic increase in adolescent transgender rates can be attributed to a combination of evolving societal attitudes towards gender diversity, increased representation of transgender individuals in the media and popular culture.

My primary research includes a questionnaire which examines the societal determinants of the rising rates of teenage transgender individuals. I will be able to obtain a broad range of attitudes from the general public, which can subsequently reflect the opinions of wider Australia. I will also interview a peer currently attending school who underwent a gender transition and then de-transitioned, which will provide valuable personal insights. Finally, through a personal reflection, I will synthesize my personal experiences with a close family member who has experienced a gender and identity transition. Through a mixed-method approach, I will collect both qualitative insights from individual experiences and quantitative data from my questionnaire.

In order to avoid conflict or prejudice, I plan to undertake this PIP with the least amount of personal bias or influence possible and conduct my questionnaire, reflection, and interviews objectively to avoid potentially skewing responses. Ultimately, my project aspires to contribute to a compassionate and inclusive society where all individuals can thrive authentically.

By the time I conclude this research project, I will have greatly enhanced my social and cultural literacy to help me uncover the underlying factors of the rising adolescent transgender rates.

Log

I had never paid much attention to gender or sexuality when I was younger. This changed as I reached Year 8 and my older sister came out as transgender. At only 13 years old, my whole world changed, and I suddenly became aware of things other people my age weren't. I supported my sister unconditionally and started calling her by her preferred name, despite people around us being more reluctant to do so. It was years later that I began thinking about how sudden her transition was, especially after she joined a new friend group. My personal experience with this issue has shaped me to be who I am today and what inspired my intense passion for my PIP topic.

Initially, I believed the increasing rates of adolescents coming out as transgender was related to the new wave of acceptance that our society had never seen before. Specifically, I figured after centuries of oppression, people were finally free to come out and be their authentic selves. However, after research within my own micro world, I came to discover this might not be the case and that this new phenomenon functions essentially as a social contagion.

To gain more knowledge on this topic, I conducted two qualitative interviews, including one with my transgender sister, which provided valuable observations into the challenges faced by transgender individuals navigating their identity formation amidst societal expectations. This interview became a very significant aspect of my PIP, as it enriched my perspective by offering firsthand insights into the lived experiences of gender dysphoria. The second interview was with a peer from my school who underwent a gender transition and subsequently de-transitioned, providing additional context and evidence to the influence of social media for a gender questioning youth and, interestingly, lack thereof when they detransitioned. The diversity of questions between each interviewee allowed for in-depth qualitative research that thoroughly progressed my topic.

Following this, a questionnaire was formulated which included 13 questions and received 74 responses. The quantitative data was valuable in elucidating meso level perceptions of societal opinions that reflect the broader trends within Australia, including cross-cultural

perspectives from different generations. However, when sampled on friends, particular responses made me realise my questions were far too broad, and I needed to refine it to gain extensive insights. This approach emphasised the importance of empirical data in understanding complex social phenomena like gender identity.

Finally, I completed a personal reflection on identity formation, cultural constructions of gender, and societal norms. This introspective methodology allowed me to synthesise analytical knowledge with personal experience to critically evaluate the way societal influences shape individual perceptions.

I believe that through the progression of my PIP, I have improved my own social and cultural literacy. Exploring themes of identity, acceptance, and societal perceptions has allowed me to delve into the complexities of gender diversity within my own family context. Further, I have begun to undergo a psychological journey of understanding and appreciating social contexts and cultures that are different from my normal social milieu, whilst critically examining notions of continuity and change in western civilisation.

Chapter 1: The Influence of Social Media on Adolescent Gender Identity

Gender identity is an individual's deeply felt sense of being a man, woman, or an alternate gender (e.g. nonbinary), which sometimes may not align with the sex that was assigned at birth¹.

During adolescence, “the emergence of self, the search for identity, the individual's relationships with others, and the role of culture throughout life”² are of the utmost importance. It has recently become increasingly intertwined with the notion of questioning one's gender and sexual identity. Over the last decade, the percentage of transgender and nonbinary youth coming out as part of the LGBTQ community in the US has doubled³. Social media has repeatedly been questioned over the role it could potentially play in shifting adolescent's minds in a leftist flurry.

The challenge of being a teenager in the twenty-first century includes the glee and perils of modern technology. Adolescents deal with pubertal body changes, the reordering of the brain, shifting relational expectations, and identity development all while juggling an online social media presence. A “growing body of research has found support for reciprocal relationships between media use and user characteristics”⁴, indicating that nearly all the devices adolescents carry are connected to social media. As such, it is clear that globalisation through the vehicle of macro institutions such as media, particularly social media, has become an integral part of adolescents' lives, shaping how they perceive themselves and interact with the world around them.

Social media has proven itself as a valuable tool that allows people of all ages and cultures to present an online identity. However, as in any other sphere of life, social media is not without its challenges. While it is capable of providing a platform for self-expression and

¹World Health Organization. (2024). Gender and Health. World Health Organization.

²Lumen. (2022). Identity Development Theory. Courses.lumenlearning.com.

³Ghorayshi, A. (2022, June 10). Report Reveals Sharp Rise in Transgender Young People in the U.S. The New York Times.

⁴Doble, K. (2018). Social Media's Influence on Adolescent Identity.

empowerment, it can also perpetuate harmful stereotypes and ideals of beauty, leading to insecurity among young people. The pressure to conform to unrealistic standards of masculinity or femininity can exacerbate existing gender dysphoria and contribute to mental health issues. 40% of transgender and gender diverse (TGD) individuals already severely self-harm themselves in their lives, and 1 in 4 experience homelessness, as well as elevated rates of depression, anxiety, alcohol and drug abuse, and PTSD⁵.

Furthermore, social media can amplify the visibility of gender-based discrimination and harassment, exposing adolescents to online bullying and hate speech⁶. Cyberbullying and online harassment can have devastating effects on the mental health and well-being of young people, leading to social isolation, self-esteem issues, and self-harm thoughts or behaviour.

That said, social media can be particularly helpful for certain LGBTQ individuals who may want to portray themselves as different to their 'real life personas'⁷. This in turn can be inspired by the online disinhibition effect, which enables individuals to share personal feelings or opinions in a way they are reluctant to do in real life. This can be spurred by the fact that they may struggle to obtain support in their real life, therefore they have to rely on online platforms to maintain connections and build friendships⁸.

Websites like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube provide a plethora of content that can feature individuals expressing their gender or sexuality in unconventional ways, challenging traditional gender roles and stereotypes. In this way, the exposure allows adolescents to experiment with different aspects of their gender identity, helping them develop a more nuanced understanding of gender beyond the traditional binary categories. Online forums and groups such as Queerspace, and hashtags including #loveislove, are associated with gender diversity and allows young people to connect with others who share similar experiences. In other words, the online world can provide helpful tools for a LGBTQ adolescent in finding answers to questions that their family and friends may not be able to help them with.

However, as with many other activities, time spent online should be balanced and perhaps monitored by adults. Research has indicated that LGBTQ youth spend significantly more

⁵ Bockting, Miner, Swinburne Romine, Hamilton, & Coleman, 2013; Haas et al., 2010; James et al., 2016

⁶Diepeveen, S. (2022, March 8). Break the bias to challenge gender norms on social media.

⁷(Primary research, interview)

⁸Charmaraman, L. (2021, September 28). Social media gives support to LGBTQ youth when in-person communities are lacking. The Conversation.

time online,⁹ even in the form of engaging passively with social media, such as watching LGBTQ YouTube content.¹⁰ Apps like Twitter, Reddit, TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and Discord have been known to have large amounts of transgender individuals active on their sites and usually form LGBTQ inclusive groups to share their experiences and provide advice¹¹.

Although the advice can be seen as helpful and with good intentions, unfortunately it can come from people without proper training in the field of gender diversity and mental health care, which can then lead the adolescent down a dangerous path away from an evidence-based care plan. It has been proposed that social media serves as informal learning environments for LGBTQ youth during their identity developmental processes¹², thereby removing the power from traditional means such as parental authority or the school system.

This change in authority and power dynamics has been exemplified by the various online transgender or LGBTQ role models and influencers who have recently come into the spotlight. Influencers have the ability to sway vulnerable kids into believing a sex change is possibly the only solution to their problems, and as a result they believe they must undergo social and physical changes.¹³ American transgender media personality Dylan Mulvaney aims to inspire young people around the globe, as her fame begun with simple TikTok videos. However, following the release of her song 'Days of Girlhood', she has been harshly criticised for mocking the notion of being a woman, posing the question of how influencers have impacted adolescents' mindsets, especially regarding their attitudes in relation to sexuality and gender.

The amount of time spent online can also have a significant impact on adolescents. For example, when time is spent searching for LGBTQ content, the social media platforms often reinforce this content. TikTok in particular has an effective algorithm to promote LGBTQ affirming content and especially transgender content on many LGBTQ 'for you pages'.¹⁴ This

⁹Craig, S. L., Eaton, A. D., McInroy, L. B., Leung, V. W. Y., & Krishnan, S. (2021). Can Social Media Participation Enhance LGBTQ+ Youth Well-Being? Development of the Social Media Benefits Scale. *Social Media + Society*, 7(1), 205630512198893.

¹⁰MacKinnon, K. R., Kia, H., & Lacombe-Duncan, A. (2021). Examining TikTok's Potential for Community-Engaged Digital Knowledge Mobilization with Equity-Seeking Groups. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 23(12), e30315.

¹¹(Primary research, interview)

¹²Fox, J., & Ralston, R. (2016). Queer identity online: Informal learning and teaching experiences of LGBTQ individuals on social media. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 65(1), 635–642.

¹³Bareth, H. (2023). The impact of social media influencers on young minds. *Indiatimes*.

¹⁴Primary research, interview

would not be a problem if the platforms were providing a balanced view, to help the adolescent on their path and provide critical input into their thinking. However, evidence shows that the content is predominantly of an affirming nature¹⁵, and thereby the reinforcement of such content narrows one's perspective by limiting exposure to diverse viewpoints and critical discussions. Additionally, the lack of balanced content may hinder the development of an adolescent's critical thinking skills, making it increasingly difficult to engage with dichotomous viewpoints. Moreover, the commercialisation of LGBTQ identities on social media severely diminishes the authenticity of the individual, while creating an echo chamber effect where adolescents are predominantly exposed to one-dimensional affirming views which stifle emotional and intellectual complexity.

The term Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria (ROGD) has been coined to define this social contagion, where people self-diagnose without any evidence or diagnosis of requiring a gender change. These days, LGBTQ inclusivity allows genderqueer children, teens, and adults to change pronouns and fluidly move from one gender identity to the next.¹⁶ This can be difficult for older generations to keep up with, and highlights the cross-cultural elements and changes across society. Further, it has become increasingly difficult for cis people to know how to refer to the new 'LGBTQQIP2SAA' community without accidentally insulting them, thereby becoming a point of tension, especially for cross-generational or cultural individuals.¹⁷

There has been a steadily rising number of de-transitioners with a study finding that 70% stated their most common reason for de-transitioning was the realisation that their gender dysphoria was related to other mental issues¹⁸. Further, those that undergo gender reassignment surgeries will never get back to their original body form and will have dysfunctional body parts, most commonly sex organs.¹⁹

¹⁵Berger, M. N., Taba, M., Marino, J. L., Lim, M. S. C., & Skinner, S. R. (2022). Social Media Use and Health and Well-being of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Youth: Systematic Review. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 24(9), e38449.

¹⁶Primary research, questionnaire

¹⁷Twenge, J. M. (2023, May 1). How Gen Z Changed Its Views On Gender. *Time*.

¹⁸Society for Evidence-Based Gender Medicine: Detransition: a Real and Growing Phenomenon. (n.d.). [Segm.org](https://www.segmd.org/);

¹⁹Primary research, interview

Finally, social media, while proving to be a valuable tool for identity experimentation, contains the power to significantly influence an adolescent's mindsets through 'influencers' and various apps that promote targeted content to individuals.

Chapter 2: The Impact of Family Dynamics and Support for Transgender Adolescents

The continued importance of parents in the lives of youth is indisputable. Starting from birth, family dynamics are an integral part of socialisation, carry over throughout adolescence, and emerge into adulthood, shaping an individual's sense of self-worth²⁰. The same goes for LGBTQ adolescents, as the journey of a transgender youth is often fraught with challenges, and familial acceptance or rejection will significantly shape their experiences and outcomes.

For transgender youth to develop a positive identity and self-worth, family acceptance is essential. Research has indicated that teenagers who identify as transgender and receive acceptance and support from their families tend to have better mental health. Transgender and non-binary teenagers with high family support scores reported less self-harm or depressive symptoms (17%) than did those with low family support scores (57%)²¹. Among transgender teenagers, acceptance from family members is also intertwined with higher levels of self-esteem and general life satisfaction. Further, high levels of parental support have been linked to fewer depressive symptoms and elevated levels of overall well-being in transgender youth.²²

On the contrary, transgender adolescents may suffer grave effects as a result of familial rejection. Transgender youth who encounter disapproval from their families are much more likely to be diagnosed with anxiety disorders and struggle with substance addiction. Further, lack of support from family splinters not only the immediate family but the extended, which typically provides the adolescent with critical early socialisation development²³. The family often has a network of sources for the adolescent, so when the child inevitably moves out of the family home, they lose many connections that they may not know how to recover, including GP's or other professionals. Further, this can lead to an additional strain on

²⁰ Primary research, questionnaire

²¹Tordoff, D. M., Wanta, J. W., Collin, A., Stepney, C., Inwards-Breland, D. J., & Ahrens, K. (2022). Mental Health Outcomes in Transgender and Nonbinary Youths Receiving Gender-Affirming Care. *JAMA Network Open*, 5(2).

²²Helen.morgan. (2023, April 25). Family Support & Rejection. *Transforming Families*.

²³ Primary research, interview

government support services such as Centrelink or Non-Government Organisations such as Twenty10. This emphasises the significant influence that family acceptance or rejection can have on not just the transgender adolescents' micro world but Australia on a macro scale.

We have in recent years seen a rise in wokeness, which is defined as “being aware of and actively attentive to important facts and issues (especially issues of racial and social justice),”²⁴. While this notion can sometimes be a positive one, it can also result in the manifestation of ‘over-acceptance’. Wokeness means the average family tends to be too accepting of gender identities, rather than being cautious and provide critical thought of the adolescent's decision to transition. In turn, this can lead to the child wishing to have gender reassignment surgery or puberty blockers, and the parents obliging despite minimal tests being done to prove genuine gender dysphoria. Gender-affirming care will very quickly lead to medicinal interventions such as puberty blockers, hormone replacement therapy and surgery, which causes irreversible damage to the human body, including horrible side effects and a lifelong dependency on medication²⁵. If they change their mind about what they have done, they will never be able to physically return to the person that they were.

Further to this, there are a number of examples where wokeness has penetrated pop culture, and impacted the lives of celebrities. A case to observe is that of Charlize Theron, who has transitioned her child, when she started noticing gender-non conforming behaviour at the age of three²⁶. This type of behaviour would typically be seen as normal for a young child, but the decision was made to socially transition nevertheless. We have to question if this decision was made for the child, or for the benefit of appearances for a woke parent? Further, excessive, baseless support can result in unreasonable expectations that are unreasonable to carry into adulthood. The infiltration of wokeness into pop culture and mainstream media in turn reflects the evolving societal attitudes towards gender identity and expression in public and private environments²⁷.

Another example on the other end of the spectrum is that of Elon Musk. In a recent interview with psychologist and right-wing influencer Dr Jordan Peterson, Musk detailed how he was “tricked” signing the documents for gender-affirming care, including puberty blockers for his

²⁴Stay Woke. (n.d.). www.merriam-webster.com.

²⁵Primary research, questionnaire

²⁶Donnelly, G. (2019, April 18). Charlize Theron: My child I thought was a boy is... a girl! Mail Online.

²⁷(Walsh, 2020b page 26)

transgender daughter, Vivian Jenna Wilson²⁸. Musk explained that he was told his child was going to commit suicide, despite there being no evidence, yet he was pressured into signing off on puberty blockers which has been linked to irreversible long-term fertility issues. He goes on to state that “it’s very possible for adults to manipulate children who are having an actual identity crisis into believing that they are the wrong gender.”²⁹ The significant influence adults wield over vulnerable adolescents must be recognised as children are more susceptible to external input and authoritative figures such as parents, teachers, and mental health professionals. This biased power dynamic can lead to questionable guidance, where the child’s exploration of their own identity is distorted by a potential capitalistic agenda rather than a genuine understanding of the child’s experiences, supported by evidence-based medical practises

Wokeness has significantly changed family dynamics. If a family is seen as being critical of their child's demand to transition, they will be deemed as non-supportive, homophobic, bigoted and dangerous for the youth to be around. In reality, the majority of parents and guardians only wish to help the youth to critically think about such a major decision that will have a permanent effect on their bodies and impact their chances of procreating.³⁰ Further, the very role of a parent in their child's life is to educate and protect them, which can only be done when they can have open discussions and ensure their child isn't blindly following a pop culture phenomenon and has been adequately and correctly diagnosed following an evidence-based process³¹.

As such, this notion of over-acceptance is deeply woven into the roots of detransitioners. The phenomenon of children "growing out of" their transgender identity by the time they are past the adolescent stage or even adults can also be called “desistance” by gender researchers. In Amsterdam, clinicians at the Centre of Expertise on Gender Dysphoria are extremely cautious about recommending social transitions due to the statistics on desistance. Thomas Steensma, a researcher and clinician at the centre, co-authored an oft-cited study in 2013 that examined 127 adolescents, all of which had displayed various levels of gender dysphoria

²⁸Elon Musk’s new mission: To “Destroy the Woke Mind Virus” after his child’s death. (2024, July 23). The Economic Times.

²⁹Adeduyite, O. (2024, July 22). “My son is dead”: Elon Musk opens up about his transgender child. Punch Newspapers.

³⁰Primary research, questionnaire

³¹ (Book Review: Matt Walsh’s Johnny the Walrus ★ the Scintillating but Ultimately Untrue Thought, n.d.)

prior to adolescence. The researchers found that 80 of the children, or 63% had desisted by the ages of 15 and 16³².

The desistance process often involves a psychological re-evaluation of personal identity, requiring individuals to reconcile their past and present selves. Clinics and doctors have recently begun to recommend individualised assessments for gender dysphoric patients, involving a multidisciplinary team to thoroughly understand their unique experiences and evaluate whether their gender dysphoria is likely to be persistent.³³ Further, the prioritisation of reversible and incremental steps, including a social transition, before considering more permanent medical interventions are critical in the journey of self discovery³⁴.

The recently published Cass Review recommends no medical intervention until the ages of 18 at the very earliest (unless there is clear clinical rationale provided). In addition to this, it is also recommended that any treatment is watched very closely until the ages of 25 years old. This close monitoring indicates that there is still very little evidence or conviction in relation to positive outcomes from gender medicine. This approach is essential to protect children and adolescents from rushing into permanent, life-altering surgeries and legal decisions.

Over-acceptance in today's society raises important questions about how to maintain a balance between autonomy and assistance when addressing one's gender identity. While it's essential to support one's sexuality or gender, it's also critical to treat each person's path with consideration and respect for their particular growth.³⁵ This means that extensive support structures are needed, with a focus on psychological health and the long-term effects of medical procedures.

Moreover, family support enables transgender youth to navigate the complexities of social and legal transitions with confidence. Families that advocate for their child's rights contribute significantly to their overall well-being and successful adaptation throughout the transition process.

³²Brooks, J. (2018, May 23). The Controversial Research on “Desistance” in Transgender Youth. KQED.

³³ Gender dysphoria is rising—and so is professional disagreement | BMJ. (n.d.).

³⁴ (Shrier, 2020 page 119)

³⁵ Primary research, questionnaire

Chapter 3: The Effects of Inclusivity in the School and Sport Environments

For transgender adolescents, the school environment can be a source of support or a site of exclusion. Schools can foster an inclusive culture by establishing clear policies and procedures including rules on non-discrimination, bullying, using the bathrooms and sport. It was found that 75% of transgender students felt unsafe at school because of their gender expression, and 70% report avoiding bathrooms.³⁶ However, at certain schools, including those in my own micro world, various policies have been implemented that address these concerns for students. The establishment of such policies guarantees that transgender students get non-discriminatory treatment and lays the groundwork for inclusivity.

Additionally, there have been a number of recent changes to the school syllabus within Australia. For example, content related to gender and sexuality is covered in the PDHPE, English, History, and Society and Culture syllabuses for schools across NSW. This is aimed at providing a higher level of including for the LGBTQ cohort, as well as teaching broader inclusion for others.

Further, some schools and organisations have implemented policies allowing people to enter facilities (including public toilets and change rooms) that are of the person's preferred gender rather than their biological sex. However, this is a widely debated topic that has fierce arguments for both sides.

There has been a worldwide discussion about whether transgender individuals should be permitted to use toilets, locker rooms or changing rooms that match their gender identity rather than their biological sex. For example, a biological man identifying as a trans woman entering the female bathrooms.

³⁶Movement Advancement Project | Separation and Stigma: Transgender Youth & School Facilities. (n.d.).

In North Carolina, a state law pertaining that transgender people were not allowed to use the lavatory designated for their gender was passed in 2016.³⁷ This stems from the fear that allowing transgender individuals to use the restroom that aligns with their gender identity allows male sexual predators into women's bathrooms³⁸. Kathryn Anthony, author of *Designing for Diversity*, told the Guardian, "People are afraid because they're exposed... There's a vulnerability we feel in public restrooms".³⁹

This debate has been extended out onto the sports field. While many pupils at school enjoy sports and team games, in recent years opinions have started to shift as the vocalisation of the unfair advantage in sport has risen dramatically. Already, elite male athletes have considerable physical advantages over female athletes as men have gone through testosterone-driven puberty and have more cardiovascular capacity, greater muscle mass, higher tendon mechanical strength, and denser bones.⁴⁰ Despite this, the International Olympic Committee began allowing trans athletes to compete in 2004.⁴¹ While it was a huge win for inclusivity and a major milestone for LGBTQ rights, it has received a fair share of criticism.

One of the best examples of this is transgender woman and competitive swimmer, Lia Thomas. The year before she began her transition, she was ranked 65th in the men's 500 freestyle and after her transition, she finished 1st in the woman's⁴². A group of her swim team's parents anonymously sent a letter to the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) arguing that Thomas should not be allowed to compete in women's competitions, stating "At stake here is the integrity of women's sports." Thomas' teammates also detailed how fellow competitors would often be "left in tears" when coming up against Thomas in the pool. Despite "everyone individually speaking to the coaches", Thomas continues to swim on the women's team and the uncomfortable teammates are told to "suck it up",⁴³ despite having to share the change rooms with Thompson's androgynous appearance and male body parts.

³⁷More states consider bills limiting which bathroom trans people can use. (2023, March 29). PBS NewsHour.

³⁸Primary research, questionnaire

³⁹Policing Queer Sexuality. (n.d.). Michigan Law Review. Retrieved July 26, 2024

⁴⁰Thomas, L. (2022, March 17). The Trans Swimmer Who Won Too Much. The New Yorker.

⁴¹Ljungqvist, A. (2021, July 13). IOC approves consensus with regard to athletes who have changed sex - Olympic News. International Olympic Committee.

⁴²Lohn, J. (2022, April 5). A Look At the Numbers and Times: No Denying the Advantages of Lia Thomas. Swimming World News.

⁴³Sanchez, R. (2022, March 3). "I Am Lia": The Trans Swimmer Dividing America Tells Her Story. Sports Illustrated.

Overall, a climate of trepidation and fear of free speech has been cultivated by the far-left. An exemplar instance of the irrational behaviour and cancel culture is that of Kellie-Jay Keen-Minshull, British women's rights activist. While holding a peaceful 'Let Women Speak' event in 2023, she was assaulted and drenched in tomato juice by transgender rights activist Eli Rubashkyn.⁴⁴ Other tactics utilised are cancellations on social platforms or being targeted by these activist groups. This toxic culture can lead to detrimental decisions, as was the case for the NCAA. They made a decision based upon woke principles and societal pressure. Essentially, it is clear they felt they needed to support trans-athlete Thomas, and staving off any risk of being perceived as a transphobic, bigoted organisation or being 'cancelled' by the new army of woke activists.

Furthermore, the power that schools have to influence and shape young minds cannot be underestimated. Due to the overwhelming 'wokeness' trend, UK councils such as Brighton and Hove wrote to parents of four-year-olds to get their children to 'choose' their gender on their school application forms. In addition, children are being taught using a diagram of a 'gender unicorn', showing sliding scales of various identities.

To provide another example of schools taking the woke acceptance to an unacceptable level, it is worth exploring the case of furrries. This made worldwide news after litter boxes were reported to be placed in US schools for children identifying as animals. Furrries are a community of children and adults who role-play as anthropomorphised animal characters and rarely identify as the animal, just with it⁴⁵. Yet, in 2021 there was an uprising of students and parents around America who demanded litter boxes were required in schools for children. While this was apparently never implemented, parents were known to "badger the school until they agreed to put a litter box in one of the stalls"⁴⁶. The phenomenon raises questions about the wider ramifications of over-acceptance in society. While recognising and honouring a range of identities is vital, it's also critical to take into account whether particular requests are reasonable in various circumstances, especially in educational settings where the main goals are academic and personal growth.

⁴⁴ Stuff. (n.d.). www.stuff.co.nz. Retrieved July 28, 2024,

⁴⁵López, Q. (2024, March 21). What Is a Furry? Everything You Need to Know About a Misunderstood Subculture.

⁴⁶Archive, V. A., & feed, G. author R. (2022, November 3). Joe Rogan finally admits that school "furry" litter box hoax was a lie. *New York Post*.

The extent of this woke culture at schools and other organisations, including medical establishments, has given rise to significant concerns for a number of governments across the globe in relation to the care of transgender youth. The UK government commissioned a review in 2020, now known as the Cass Review, to investigate gender dysphoria and the best clinical treatment for transgender individuals. The findings and recommendations of Dr Hillary Cass were published in April 2024, where she recognised that the journey to transition begins in the “home, family and school environment”⁴⁷. She stated that the impact of what happens in schools ‘cannot be underestimated’ and that educational institutions and colleges need guidance that utilises the principles and evidence set out in the report.

The UK National Health Service (NHS) originally commissioned the Cass Review in response to government concerns about the rising number of teenage girls wishing to transition⁴⁸. The review itself examines a number of theories for this rise, such as pornography, peer pressure, bullying, social media trends, and the inadequate diagnosis of autism and other mental health issues. However, schools were also recognised as a factor. The UK schools, more than any other institution, have legitimised and promoted scientifically inaccurate ideas about sex and gender to a captive audience of young pupils, a major misuse of their power and authority

Furthermore, as a result of the increasing concerns for transgender children wishing to physically transition, the UK government published guidance for schools and colleges in December 2023. The cross-cultural perspective recommends that teachers and professors adopt a ‘cautious approach’ and should not ‘proactively initiate action towards a child's social transition’.⁴⁹ By suggesting this precautionary but sensible approach, the parents become the critical component in the child’s transition, and can support critical decisions on their journey. Schools, that may only have known the child for months, should not be in any position to make permanent decisions for gender questioning, and often very confused, children. It is a natural phase for a child that is best explored with family and close relations.

Further, it is unfair to put such enormous pressure on the teachers and schools that enables them to “transition children” albeit only through social transitions. Luckily, this is not the

⁴⁷Moseley, I. M. L.-J. (2024, May 1). Cass review: implications for schools and colleges. Lexology.

⁴⁸Cass, H. (2024, April). Final Report – Cass Review. [Cass.independent-Review.uk](https://www.cass-independent-review.uk).

⁴⁹Department for Education. (2023, December 19). Gender questioning children: Everything you need to know about new draft guidance for schools - the education hub. [Educationhub.blog.gov.uk](https://www.educationhub.blog.gov.uk).

case in many countries. However, in the US, some states, such as California, New Jersey, and Maryland, explicitly advise schools not to disclose any information to the parents about a students' gender identity.

Overall, school and sporting environments should be for exactly that. Education and fitness. We should not expect these places to encourage our children towards any gender transition, medical or social. What we must expect from these institutions though is inclusion and support to all.

Conclusion

In undertaking this Personal Interest Project on adolescent transgender identity, I have found it to be a transformative journey that deepened my understanding of the complexities surrounding gender diversity and acceptance. I have found that modern society acts as a pendulum of inclusivity that has swung excessively far to the left, and now must face the repercussions. In this sense, I have learnt the influence of gender and sexuality as socialising factors, as well as both the positive and negative aspects of the macro world ideologies on micro world functions.

Through my exploration of gender identity development, I have come to see the challenges of baseless support and societal pressures, which reinforce the need for balanced and informed approaches to gender identity exploration, especially within the medical realm. This research project delved into societal values, media stereotypes, and family dynamics to illustrate the complexities and dangers of over-acceptance and inclusion. As a result, I have found that adolescents have been, and continue to be, subject to an overwhelming social contagion and face substantial influence from a combination of social media, peer groups or family relationships. I would recommend that as a global community, we need to carefully consider a path forward that provides an evidence-based process for gender-questioning youth, and guidelines on the implementation of precautionary measures that protects them from harmful external social factors, while respecting our cross-cultural differences like religion and family values.

My primary research methods proved to successfully and effectively assist the final outcome of my PIP. The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative primary research methodologies in the form of an interview, questionnaire and personal reflection has effectively refined a diverse framework of social and cultural research and allowed me to gain a comprehensive understanding of the transgender field. I initially struggled to gain a sufficient amount of responses to my surveys. However, through the support of my teacher, I distributed them through various social media platforms, which allowed me to gather a variety of real and authentic perspectives from outside my micro and meso world. These primary research

methods produced a significant amount of data that I triangulated with my secondary research to help develop a well-informed synthesis, which further improved my academic writing and social anthropological skills.

In addition to my PIP rendering a heightened perspective of differing world views on a macro scale, it also allowed me to make sense of the society and culture I live in today. Through the progression of my research, I was essentially given the opportunity to deconstruct social paradigms and ideologies in order to develop a resonant link between them and my micro world, allowing me to develop profound insights relating to individuals, gender identity, inclusion, and technology.

This research paper thoroughly improved my social and cultural literacy by helping me to understand and appreciate the various beliefs and values of diverse societies and cultures. It also helped me to conduct ethical and innovative research that demonstrated critical judgement. My primary research, specifically the questionnaire, addressed the continuities and changes within our western civilisation, most significantly the changes implemented by the woke trend. To this end, the PIP process was invaluable, and I feel a great sense of pride in completing a project that I am personally interested in and has a fundamental role in the modern social world currently.

Annotated Resource List

Primary Sources:

Interview with my transgender sister, 14th of March 2024

I conducted one qualitative in person interview, which consisted of 17 questions with my sister. She is currently 19 years old and socially transitioned at the age of 14. Although she moved out of the family home, I have retained a relationship with her, and she was keen to share her personal experiences and exploration of gender identity. It is the notion of gender dysphoria and individual identity that my sister characterises herself by, and thus is the very basis of my PIP. From her responses, I gained extensive knowledge and understanding around the experiences and expectations of a transgender adolescent as she navigates the complexities of her life. She explained the impacts and ramifications of certain medications and treatments that she personally had to endure, which was immensely helpful for the writing process of chapters 2 and 3. Moreover, my sister was the only reason I ever looked into this issue and thereby was the sole reason for my PIP. Through her interview, she explained in explicit detail the social and cultural ways in which she had been effected throughout her transition and provided background to current transgender context. This interview was absolutely crucial to my hypothesis, topic sentence and progression of my chapter 1 as she highlighted the significant role of social media and noted that platforms like TikTok and Instagram provide validation for transgender individuals, which affirms and influences young people exploring their own gender identity. She went on to discuss the importance of family dynamics, the impact it had in her own micro world, and provided examples of disapproving households of her friends on the meso scale. The interview included her own observations on the broader cultural shifts towards greater acceptance and the ways modern society has continued and changed. This interview was a premium source of information and I feel extremely privileged to have accessed it.

Interview with a detransitioned peer, 3rd of May 2024

The second interview I conducted was over email with one of my fellow peers from school who had transitioned from her biological gender when she was 14 and then detransitioned 13 months later, back to her initial gender. This interview was critical to my PIP and provided profound insights into the personal and social dynamics that currently influence transgender individuals. Her initial exploration of gender identity involved social and legal aspects of transitioning, including changing her legal name to her preferred name, however she never took any testosterone or had any medical surgeries to enhance her gender identity. This interview was particularly helpful in portraying the powerful role of online communities in shaping gender experiences. This all ties into the notion of my chapter one topic, which illuminates the influence of social media such as TikTok and Instagram on vulnerable adolescents. She provided many examples of popular transgender influencers and celebrities who played a profound role in impacting her self perception and identity formation to highlight the dual nature of technology and more prominently social media. Although she only went into minor detail about family dynamics that have impacted her, it was still helpful to understand the varying degrees of parents accepting their transgender adolescents. The limitations of this research method must be considered when analysing the data collected, including the fact that it was conducted through email correspondence, therefore limiting information as data could not have been gathered from non-verbal cues and answers could not be further elaborated on. However, this interview provided insight into transgender-centered groups such as "Transtopia Youth", who play a significant role in perpetuating and affirming children towards a specific gender identity. However, I do believe that I left this interview too late and could have done it earlier to gain valuable knowledge that I could have centred my secondary research in. Nevertheless, this was an excellent resource.

Questionnaire, 19th of February 2024

The first primary research method I conducted was a questionnaire with 13 questions, which was first sent out as a pilot study to around 5 people to ensure the clarity and open-ended nature of the questions. Following this, it was distributed to my friends, family and around my school community, resulting in some responses. However, I did not get as many as I was expecting and decided to distribute it on online social platforms including Snapchat and

Facebook and generated a total of 74 responses. The purpose of this questionnaire was to gather insights into the beliefs and attitudes of the general public in Australia relating to the new trends of gender dysphoria and identity. Through the use of qualitative open questions, I invited the respondents to reflect upon the continuities and changes in modern society as well as the evolution of gender ideology disseminated within micro, meso and macro spheres. The data from this questionnaire was of tremendous help in substantiating secondary research and other primary methodologies, particularly the increasing rates of transgender adolescents and societal influences, all of which contributing to the reliability of conceptual claims made in this PIP. However, there are a number of limitations in this qualitative research method that must be acknowledged when assessing data and validity. The questionnaire presented a notable gender bias with 73.4% of respondents identifying as female, therefore skewing the data into a female-oriented perspective. Further, the questionnaire was limited to my micro and meso spheres and thereby can not be considered reflective of the general public's views. Nevertheless, this primary research method was extensively beneficial for investigating the micro and meso Australian perspectives on transgender ideology.

Personal Reflection, 16th of May 2024

The final primary research method I conducted was a personal reflection that delved into the complex interplay between identity formation, cultural conceptions of gender, and societal norms, with a distinct focus on adolescent transgender experiences. I was able to reflect upon my own personal experiences with my transgender sister and the ways in which her transition impacted me and my family. This reflection provided a comprehensive exploration of how personal and societal factors converge to shape gender identity. Further, it goes on to discuss the ways in which cultural beliefs and practices influence how individuals express their gender identity. This research method has an obvious personal bias as it draws together all of my experiences, beliefs and personal perspectives. However, it contains a unique and analytical synthesis that provides a critical lens into the broader influences in the cultural and societal realm. This introspective research methodology thoroughly combines personal anecdotes with analytical insights to provide a comprehensive understanding of the societal impacts on individual perceptions of gender. By integrating my own personal experiences with the broader cultural and social analysis, it offers a multifaceted outlook on the factors that have recently contributed to the dramatically rising rates of adolescent transgender identities.

Secondary sources:

Documentaries

Matt Walsh, what is a woman documentary (Dailymotion. (n.d.). Wwww.dailymotion.com.
<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x8li4ui>)

This documentary was one of the most significant aspects of my PIP secondary research and played a large role in shaping my hypothesis and focus question. This educational documentary raises the very valid question of whether the recent gender ideology is something we should be blindly following and subscribe to without questioning it. There was no aspect of bias, pride or argumentative behavior, just objective truth and facts which may be unsettling to those who are uncomfortable with it.

Books

Walsh, M. (2022). Johnny the Walrus. DW Books.
<https://ia601503.us.archive.org/28/items/johnny-the-walrus-matt-walsh/Johnny%20The%20Walrus%20%28Matt%20Walsh%29.pdf>

This book was very helpful in my understanding of what a child goes through in the current western world, where the new age of wokeness has reshaped our western society and recently begun infiltrating the education system by teaching young children about gender expression and different acts of sexuality. This book enabled my thought process towards the impact of the school system on adolescents and young adults.

Walsh, M. (2020). Church of Cowards: A Wake-Up Call to Complacent Christians. In Perlego. Regnery Gateway.
<https://www.perlego.com/book/1440520/church-of-cowards-a-wakeup-call-to-complacent-Christians-pdf>

This book was useful to understand the multifaceted nature of Western civilisation. The author, Matt Walsh, eloquently illustrates the ways in which Christianity is dissolving and raises points on the new societal attitudes and ideologies that may be attributed to this. I did not explicitly use this material in my chapters as there was a religious bias in the work, however it was helpful in shaping my understanding of socialisation in western cultures

Shrier, A. (2020). Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters By Abigail Shrier (z Lib.org). In Internet Archive. Regnery Publishing.

<https://archive.org/details/irreversible-damage-the-transgender-craze-seducing-our-daughters-by-abigail-shrier-z-lib.org>

This book was one of the most exceptionally well researched and well written pieces I had ever read, laying out the clearly damaging phenomenon that is sweeping through the western world. The author Abigail Shrier is not transphobic nor a conservative, thereby emitting little bias, as she simply noticed a disturbing trend amongst young girls and decided to research it more thoroughly. Her language is very emotive, however she provides great evidence when she makes strong claims, such as the age the law permits teens to medically transition being too young as they are emotionally immature and how easily these harmful medical interventions can be accessed by many teenagers.

Websites

After Cass, let's kick trans ideology out of the classroom. (2024, April 16). After Cass, let's kick trans ideology out of the classroom.

<https://www.spiked-online.com/2024/04/16/after-cass-lets-kick-trans-ideology-out-of-the-classroom/>

This source was crucial to shape my understanding of the dynamics in the Western classrooms in relation to gender identity and education. It also was valuable as it laid out the details of the Cass Review and led to a further analysis of its impacts on adolescents. I

implemented quotes and phrases from this source in my PIP, as it provided invaluable insight and a detailed investigation which inspired and set my own ideas in motion.

Critical benefits of familial and community support for transgender youth | national council on family relations. (2021, April 26). Wwww.ncfr.org.

<https://www.ncfr.org/news/critical-benefits-familial-and-community-support-transgender-youth>

This source combined qualitative and quantitative research to provide a balanced view about the benefits of family and community support for transgender individuals. It also provided statistics that I was able to incorporate into my PIP central material, which furthered my hypothesis and points with evidence. This secondary source was vital throughout the development of my second chapter and largely contributed to my observations and recommendations.

Geary, D. C. (2023, February 10). Understanding the Rise of Transgender Identities.

Quillette. <https://quillette.com/2023/02/10/social-contagion-and-transgender-identities/>

This source provided a helpful perspective of gender dysphoria as a social contagion. It explained that the societal dynamics of teenage girls' friendship and peer groups, including the strong desire to fit in, will make them more susceptible to social contagion than others. This was crucial to understand for chapter one, as it provides adequate reasoning towards the rising transgender rates in the youth.

Guidelines for the inclusion of transgender and gender diverse people in sport. (2019).

https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/ahrc_transgender_and_gender_diverse_guidelines_2019.pdf

This source was somewhat helpful to exhibit the guidelines for the inclusion of transgender individuals. This is valuable as it was developed by the Australian Human Rights Commission, which is a credible source. However, it demonstrated to have over-accepting

principles for sport which is unsustainable, but it was still helpful to understand recent changes in rules and regulations.

Kenny, D. (n.d.). The social contagion of gender dysphoria – Professor Dianna T. Kenny. Diannakenny.com.au. <https://diannakenny.com.au/the-social-contagion-of-gender-dysphoria/>

This source was one of the first articles I read upon starting my secondary research for my PIP, and remains one of the most valuable and credible. It details the mechanisms of a social contagion and outlines the similarities of gender dysphoria as a social contagion. The comprehensive analysis and precise articulation of nebulous concepts made it a pivotal component of my research, providing a concrete foundation for the development of my hypothesis-driven framework. This became the very basis for my PIP and topic question, thereby completely shaping my view on the issue.

Mayo Clinic Staff. (2024, January 18). Teens and social media use: What's the impact? Mayo Clinic; Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/tween-and-teen-health/in-depth/teens-and-social-media-use/art-20474437>

This source outlines the positives and negatives regarding the use of social media and the impacts on the adolescent. It offered a fair assessment of both sides and had research and statistics to back up all arguments. However, I got more value out of this source as it provided many ways in which one can protect themselves or their family from the harmful effects of social media, a key aspect of chapter 1 of my PIP.

Narduzzi, M. (2023, May 8). An open secret: social contagion is driving the astronomic rise in teen gender dysphoria - Person and Identity Project. The Person and Identity Project. <https://personandidentity.com/an-open-secret-social-contagion-is-driving-the-astronomic-rise-in-teen-gender-dysphoria/>

I found this source to be incredibly helpful as it not only established the rising rates of transgender adolescents as a social contagion, per my hypothesis, but calls out the social institutions that hold the responsibility to protect children, “including governments, universities and schools, human rights commissions, legal institutions, and sporting bodies”. This ties into themes of authority and power, which I delved into throughout my chapters.

New Study Examines The “Social Contagion” Hypothesis Of Transgender And Gender Diverse Identities - Fenway Health: Health Care Is A Right, Not A Privilege. (2022, August 3). Fenway Health.

<https://fenwayhealth.org/new-study-examines-the-social-contagion-hypothesis-of-transgender-and-gender-diverse-identities/>

This secondary source explained the perspective of a study published in *‘Pediatrics’*, which supposedly provided evidence against the claim that adolescents identify as transgender due to a social contagion. This source held bias from the author as a member of the LGBTQ community, however it was still useful to provide a perspective different to my own.

Peterson, J. (2024, March 21). Understanding “social contagion theory” and what it means for trans kids | Xtra Magazine. Xtra Explains.

<https://xtramagazine.com/health/trans-health/social-contagion-theory-explained-263013>

This source was invaluable in explaining the term “rapid-onset gender dysphoria” (ROGD) and the role it plays for the individual and in Western civilisation today. It also provided a multitude of statistics and data about the prevalence of ROGD, demographic trends, and the impact of social and media influences on gender identity in order to back up each claim and idea that was brought up.

Respaut, R., Terhune, C., & Conlin, M. (2022, December 22). Why detransitioners are crucial to the science of gender care. Reuters.

<https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/usa-transyouth-outcomes/>

This source was valuable as it provided scientific and personal insights into detransitioning. It combines the personal experience of detransitioner Dr Kinnon MacKinnon with insight into gender-affirming care and the ways in which adolescents and young adults can be cared for in the medical realm. This shaped my perspective on detransitioning and how it has become more normalised.

Steinmetz, K. (2016, May 2). Why LGBT Advocates Say Bathroom “Predators” Argument Is a Red Herring. Time; Time.

<https://time.com/4314896/transgender-bathroom-bill-male-predators-argument/>

This source was helpful in my understanding of the other side of the argument for transgender people to be allowed into the bathroom of their choice. This article denounces the idea that it could allow predators into the bathrooms and instead states that it is inclusive to included everyone. While I may not personally agree with the source, it is useful for me to understand all aspects of the controversy.

Supporting trans and gender diverse children and their families. (n.d.). Emerging Minds.

Retrieved July 26, 2024, from

<https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/supporting-trans-and-gender-diverse-children-and-their-families/#:~:text=Support%20at%20an%20early%20age>

This source was crucial to understand the importance of supporting transgender adolescents and children. While it was more statistics focused, it provided some good ideas, however it was mainly helpful to my PIP for the statistics on transgender and LGBTQ acceptance. By analysing and understanding the trends and patterns presented, I was able to better assess the relationship between societal and cultural attitudes combined with the experiences of transgender youth.

Townley, C., Davies, C., Pang, K., Robinson, K. H., & Skinner, R. (2023, April 3). Family support protects trans young people – but their families need support too. The Conversation.

<https://theconversation.com/family-support-protects-trans-young-people-but-their-families-need-support-too-202743>

This source emphasised the need for support for not only the transgender adolescent or young adult but the family members as well. This is a view I support very heavily due to my personal experience with the topic, and as such allowed me to expand on these ideas in chapter 2 of my PIP. The validity of this article was also credible as it was a well known source with little prejudice and bias.