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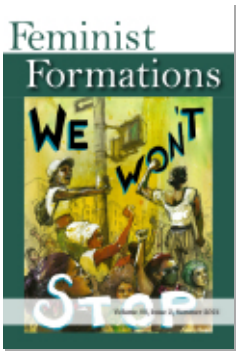

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Panoptical Time, Cissexism, and Heterosexism: How Discourses of Adultism Discipline Queer and Trans Youth

Seventy F. Hall

In this article, I apply Nancy Lesko's concept of panoptical time to a critical analysis of the interconnectedness between adultism, cissexism, and heterosexism. I explore the impacts of these interconnections on LGBTQ youth in the United States through two case examples: rapid-onset gender dysphoria and its links to the transtrender phenomenon in digital spaces, and the It Gets Better Project. I use an intersectional feminist lens to examine media and scholarly discourses that exemplify the instruments and techniques of panoptical time, as well as the mechanisms that reinforce it. The first case example draws from blog posts, YouTube videos, and scholarly literature about rapid-onset gender dysphoria and transtrenders to illustrate how disciplines that support these phenomena reflect ties between adultism, cissexism, and other systems of subordination. The second case example uses footage from the original It Gets Better video and findings from previous studies to demonstrate how this campaign relies on similar instruments of discipline to normalize heterosexism and cissexism in youth-related contexts. Finally, I discuss the implications of this analysis and explain why LGBTQ communities have a personal stake in advocating for the rights of LGBTQ youth.

Keywords: homophobia / LGBTQ youth / rapid-onset gender dysphoria / transphobia / youth culture / youths' rights

Introduction

Adultism is a system of oppression that gives adults the power to control, discipline, and act on behalf of youth without their consent, stripping them of the

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rights and privileges enjoyed by most adults and barring them from participation in the decision-making processes that shape institutions (Bell 1995, 1). Because adultism has become so deeply embedded in the fabric of society, its reinforcement appears not only justified but necessary to the organization and governance of social systems (Lesko 2001, 101). Adultism has a unique impact on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth, as the adults who control the spaces that youth inhabit tend to uphold conventional cissexist and heterosexist values (Schroeder 2012).[1]

In this article, I put Nancy Lesko's concept of *panoptical time* into dialogue with intersectional feminist theories to launch a critique on adultism as it pertains to LGBTQ youth in the United States. Panoptical time draws from Michel Foucault's theory of panopticism, as well as postcolonial theories, to explain how youths' identities and bodies are surveilled and disciplined through colonial time (Lesko 2001, 111–20). I argue that due to its symbiotic relationship with other forms of oppression, adultism normalizes and perpetuates cissexism and heterosexism within institutions that govern youths' lives (Ehrenreich 2002, 276–77). I examine two case examples to illustrate how adultism functions as a set of disciplines that limit possibilities for self-identification and expression within the LGBTQ community: rapid-onset gender dysphoria (ROGD) and its ties to the transtrender phenomenon in LGBTQ digital spaces, and the It Gets Better Project (IGBP). Finally, I discuss the implications of this analysis and explain the potential advantages of adopting an intersectional, anti-adultist approach to addressing heterosexism, cissexism, and other forms of oppression.

Adultism and Its Impact on LGBTQ Youth

As a system of oppression specific to youth, adultism manifests in a variety of ways. Youth are legally, financially, and emotionally dependent on adults, who may shirk their obligations as caregivers, engage in abusive behaviors, or interact with youth in ways that reflect a sense of entitlement to unconditional respect and obedience (Bell 1995, 2–4; Conner et al. 2016, 17). Youth who speak out against their mistreatment or express opinions that deviate from those of adults place themselves at risk of being punished or losing privileges (Bell, 3). For youth of color, the repercussions may manifest as state violence at the hands of educators and law enforcement (Gordon 2010, 155–60; Goff et al. 2014).

Popular discourses on youth culture depict young people as passive "citizens-in-the-making rather than as actualized political actors" capable of self-advocacy in the absence of support from adults (Gordon 2010, 10). Adults expect youth to adapt to their disempowerment in spaces (e.g., schools) that are purposefully kept apolitical to appease staff, administrators, and legal guardians (Meyer 2017, 122). Even though these spaces are necessarily political due to their embeddedness within the broader sociopolitical milieu, youth often have few opportunities to exercise political agency within them, and the opportunities that do exist are not accessible across youth subgroups (Gordon, 61–69). For example, acts

of resistance among youth of color are treated with greater impunity, and they may need adult gatekeepers to legitimize their movements or provide safe spaces for organizing (Gordon, 31–35). To make matters worse, adults frequently blame youth for being unable to overcome these structural barriers to engagement by demonizing them or labeling them as disengaged or apathetic while making little effort to advocate on their behalves (Conner et al. 2016, 5). Adultism harms youth by stifling voice, sense of autonomy, and self-worth, contributing to feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness (Bell 1995, 2–5; DeJong 2014). Youth may internalize adultist messages and reproduce age-based power imbalances within their peer groups (Gordon, 88; Conner et al. 2016, 22–26). Finally, adultism creates rifts between youth and adults that impede solidarity based on shared political interests (Gordon, 98–121).

Adultism renders the spaces that youth inhabit inhospitable for anyone who challenges heteronormativity or cisnormativity (Schroeder 2012). That only 53.3 percent of respondents to the 2017 Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) National School Climate Survey reported having Gay-Straight Alliances at their schools suggests that LGBTQ youth lack adequate support from staff and administrators in forming clubs that may be linked to improvements in academic and health-related outcomes (Kosciw et al. 2018, 56; Gordon 2010, 61–72; Walls et al. 2010; Poteat et al. 2012). Moreover, only a small minority of GLSEN's survey participants stated that their schools' anti-bullying and harassment policies included protections for sexual orientation or gender identity and expression (12.6 percent) or that the sex education they received incorporated positive portrayals of LGBTQ relationships (6.7 percent) (Kosciw et al., 57–61). Outside of the education system, adults control and regulate the means of knowledge production, often constructing pathological narratives about LGBTQ youth to support the need for reform (Talburt 2004, 116–18). Although many of these efforts are well-intentioned, they are also reductionist and rely on public health tropes of "at riskness" and deviancy (Bryan and Mayock 2012; Talburt, 117). These discourses erase within-group diversity by automatically sorting all youth into one of two overly simplified categories: "at-risk [or] well-adjusted" (Bryan and Mayock, 8; Talburt, 117).[2]

Finally, and most important to the current discussion on LGBTQ youth, adults have the authority to police the identities and expressions of young people, whom they frequently view as incapable of authentic self-identification (Hill and Menvielle 2009, 255–56). Policing—both by law enforcement and other adult actors—may constitute and reinforce compulsory cis-heterosexuality and conventional expressions of femininity and masculinity. For example, a study by Forrest Stuart and Ava Benezra found that Black male youth used public displays of heterosexual affection to appear more empathetic and less criminal to the police (Stuart and Benezra 2018). These performances of heterosexuality, whether pretend (e.g., with a friend, stranger, or family member) or real (i.e., with a romantic or sexual partner), required hyperfemininity from the young

women who took part in them, as walking with a masculine-presenting woman increased one's risk of being profiled and harassed by law enforcement.

Theoretical Framework

The case examples presented in this article are emblematic of how adultism impacts LGBTQ youth and the LGBTQ community as a whole. The theoretical framework I have applied to this analysis puts intersectionality into dialogue with Lesko's panoptical time to illuminate the interrelatedness of adultism, cissexism, and heterosexism. In this section, I explore the philosophical underpinnings of Lesko's concept of panoptical time, starting with a summary of Foucault's theory of panopticism ([1975] 1979). I then explain how Lesko's critique of the cultural construction of adolescence builds on Foucault's work (Lesko 2001). Finally, I introduce Nancy Ehrenreich's intersectional theory of *symbiosis* as an analytical tool for revealing the mechanisms that impel adults and youth to participate in dynamics that reinforce oppressive conditions (Ehrenreich 2002). These theories will inform my critiques of the two case examples that follow.

Foucault's Panopticon

In his theory of panopticism, Foucault used Jeremy Bentham's architectural blueprint of the ideal prison as a metaphor for a system of surveillance that induces in its subjects a permanent state of hypervisibility under the gaze of an invisible watchman. Because the authority figure is not always visible to those under surveillance, its presence cannot be verified with absolute certainty; people must act as though they are always being watched (Foucault [1975] 1979, 200–9). The panopticon derives its strength from methods of control and manipulation called *disciplines*, which reduce subjects' bodies to machine-like *relations of docility-utility*. Once bodies have become docile through obedience, their forces can be optimized and harnessed for exploitative purposes (Foucault, 136–38). Within the context of the panopticon, where anyone can fill the watchman's role at any time, the operation of these disciplines becomes anonymous and more dispersed, rendering all individuals simultaneously visible and subject to possible surveillance (201–2).

The panopticon employs spatial organization mechanisms called *techniques of distribution* and uses *instruments of discipline* to control and manipulate subjects within this structure. The first technique of distribution, the *enclosure* (e.g., schools and hospitals), was designed to restrict subjects' movements, after which institutions partitioned the spaces within each enclosure to fix individuals' bodies within specific locations for ease of observation. *Functional sites* were then invented to justify the supervision of specialized functions, such as learning and working. Foucault theorized that one of the functional site's primary purposes was to prevent the spread of ideas that institutional authorities perceived as dangerous to the prevailing social order. Finally, subjects' behaviors and characteristics were assigned value according to a rank order scale of measurement,

a technique responsible for the advent of age-graded institutions (e.g., schools) (Foucault [1975] 1979, 141–92; Lesko 2001, 120–22).

Foucault discussed three instruments of discipline: *hierarchical observation*, *normalizing judgment*, and *the examination*.[3] Hierarchical observation is the *network of gazes* by which multiple people exercise power over one another, whereas normalizing judgment is the corrective instrument that automatically administers punishments and rewards to coerce subjects into compliance with the norms of that structure. Normalizing judgment evaluates all actions according to a single set of universal standards such that any behavior in violation of these standards is punished, often through ridicule or by diagnosing individuals as abnormal versus normal or healthy versus sick. The examination consists of ritualized acts of measurement and documentation, such as medical assessments and tests of academic achievement, that serve to institutionalize the first two instruments of discipline (Foucault, 170–92).

Foucault pointed to educational institutions as sites of discipline and punishment for LGBTQ youth when he stated that "the school building was to be a mechanism for training . . . [to] prevent debauchery and homosexuality" (Foucault, 172). However, his analysis of young people focused heavily on spatial instruments of discipline, treating time only in the immediate sense as a tool for ordering gestures and tasks according to efficiency measures. For example, he identified the "time-table" as a standard against which timeliness could be judged and argued that the primary goal of age-grading was to enable teachers to instruct, observe, evaluate, and discipline entire groups of youth at one time and in one place (Foucault, 147–49). His analysis fell short of examining the surveillance and discipline of entire developmental periods like adolescence. Lesko's work expands Foucault's analysis by examining how the compression of youthfulness into the cultural construct of adolescence enables adults to surveil and discipline youths' development over time.

Lesko's Panoptical Time

According to Lesko, the perception that youth need to be disciplined and surveilled by adults has its origins in the mass panic about decay and degeneracy during the Victorian era (Lesko 2001, 25–39). These fears found their pseudoscientific basis in the widespread adoption of recapitulation theory as a framework for organizing schools and other youth-serving institutions (Lesko, 49–68). This theory was based on the premise that fundamental parallels could be drawn between child development and the evolution of the human species. Scientists who subscribed to recapitulation theory believed that they could gauge a racial group's evolutionary status by comparing its members to children at different stages of development. Youth, homosexuals, women, and people of color were denounced as primitive species; only the white, abled, heterosexual adult male had reached the most advanced evolutionary stage (Lesko, 31–39).[4] The white male adolescent's transition from youth to adulthood, then, symbolized a fork

in the road whereby the human species either showed signs of optimal future development or of regressing to a more primitive state of existence. Challenging adult authority became increasingly difficult the more necessary it seemed to mitigate the risk of social decline through the management of adolescents' maturation processes (Lesko, 93–101).

Lesko used the term *panoptical time* to describe the phenomenon by which scholars and professionals collapse the essence and embodiment of youth into one readily observable and manageable time period called adolescence. Panoptical time is linked to theories of colonialism because it relegates youth to a less evolved location in time relative to adults. Adults' conception of youth as frozen in time, perpetually anticipating their impending adulthood, renders young people's realities ultimately secondary to those of adults (Lesko 2001, 122–24). Adults can find validation for their humanity by gazing upon the inferior, subhuman adolescent Other (DeJong and Love 2015, 497; Lesko, 11–35; Fanon [1952] 2008, 68–73). The younger, less mature category of youth is requisite to upholding *adult supremacy*, as without it, adulthood would cease to exist as a social category (DeJong and Love, 490; Lesko, 10–11).

The *adult gaze* disciplines youth within the context of panoptical time, ranks them according to their ages, and judges their behaviors according to normative developmental standards (Gordon 2010, 133–54; Foucault [1975] 1979, 177–84). Youth adapt to the ever-present threat of being watched by internalizing adults' standards regarding appropriate development. Once youth have internalized the adult gaze, they begin to police one another in its absence, forming networks of observation and control within their peer groups and exercising normalizing judgment to maintain the order of those networks and the norms that drive their operations (Conner et al. 2016, 22–26; Foucault, 177–84). Young people integrate adult expectations into their identities and monitor their peers for deviations worthy of punishment, which often takes the form of bullying (Lesko 2001, 125–26). This process is frequently structured by multiple factors, including age, race, and gender, the effects of which may be internalized by youth. Lesko explained adolescents' tendencies to assimilate to the language of adults in a manner that closely resembles Fanon's description of the effects of colonization on the psyche: "the more the black Antillean assimilates the French language, the whiter he gets—i.e., the closer he comes to becoming a true human being" ([1952] 2008, 2). Thus, the adult gaze of acknowledgment and approval can feel falsely liberating to youth as it seems to affirm their humanity (Fanon, 89).

Despite its strong focus on instruments of discipline that oppress youth, Lesko's theory of panoptical time does not come equipped with a lexicon for theorizing the complex mechanisms by which adultism and other forms of oppression coexist and reinforce one another. It is not sufficient to describe the networks of observation that supply the structure for surveillance and discipline within the context of panoptical time; one must also understand the dynamics that compel adults and youth to contribute to and reproduce these

oppressive conditions. Ehrenreich's intersectional theory of symbiosis offers tools for conducting in-depth analyses of these motivating factors (Ehrenreich 2002).

Symbiosis as a Tool for Intersectional Analysis

Intersectionality is known for examining the interrelations between multiple systems of power and oppression in a way that recognizes the whole as greater than the sum of its parts and draws attention to the "mutual shaping of these systems of social relations" (Crenshaw 1991; Walby et al. 2012, 235). Ehrenreich theorized the mutually reinforcing nature of systems of power and oppression, emphasizing the relational dynamics that create and sustain symbiotic ties between two or more subordinating systems (2002, 256). She used the symbiotic relationship between plant roots and fungi as a metaphor for these dynamics: "if we conceptualize one such system as the fungus and the other as the plant . . . their mutual need for each other is made clear" (Ehrenreich, 278). For example, heterosexism and cissexism do not merely intersect with adultism; adultism provides the context for heterosexist and cissexist conditions to thrive in youth-serving institutions. To claim that adults minimize the identities of LGBTQ youth by referring to them as phases solely due to heterosexism or cissexism would obscure the adultism that makes these disrespectful comments acceptable only when adults use them to describe younger people (Chan 2006, 165). This claim would also fail to challenge the implication that queerness is something that one should strive to outgrow before reaching adulthood.

It is worth noting that Ehrenreich did not identify herself as an intersectional scholar, but instead aimed to contribute to the post-intersectional scholarship that emerged during the late 1990s and early 2000s. The post-intersectional turn was an effort by critical legal scholars to overcome what they perceived to be intersectionality's epistemological limitations (Kwan 2000). A full critique of post-intersectionality is beyond the scope of this article. Briefly, some intersectional theorists have critiqued post-intersectionality for misinterpreting or oversimplifying intersectionality and failing to provide anything "analytically or conceptually distinct from" it (Cho 2013, 387). Others have raised concerns over the implication that Black feminist scholarship should be relegated to a "backward, Black moment" in time (King 2015, 133). Although many of Ehrenreich's arguments are worthy of the same critiques, her theory of symbiosis offers a useful framework for uncovering aspects of oppression that might otherwise remain hidden. Because the post-intersectional framing of symbiosis is not essential to its theoretical constitution, I classify Ehrenreich's work as intersectional. The current analysis will examine Ehrenreich's concepts, hereafter referred to as *symbiotic mechanisms* and italicized below, to reveal the symbiosis between adultism, cissexism, and heterosexism at the intersections of racism, classism, ableism, and other systems of subordination.

First, LGBTQ individuals of all ages may *exclude* from their political agendas the interests of youth who do not conform to conventional expectations to

avoid having their own identities and claims to oppression discredited (Ehrenreich 2002, 258–315). When the experiences of dominant group members (e.g., white, cisgender, gay men) serve as paradigms for LGBTQ political agendas, racialized and gendered forms of heterosexism and cissexism go unquestioned (Ehrenreich, 282). For example, the fact that Black youth must strategically deploy heterosexual displays of affection to maintain their safety reveals the problematic nature of excluding heterosexism from anti-racist politics and racism from LGBTQ politics (Stuart and Benezra 2018). In this case, heterosexism is the standard against which Black youth are judged as innocent or guilty, and racism justifies the reinforcement of these heterosexist standards as a means of disciplining Black youth.

The mutually reinforcing nature of symbiosis also produces *vulnerability*, especially among the multiply subordinated who may find it difficult to resist any single axis of oppression when other systems have already marked them as deviant (Ehrenreich 2002, 283). For instance, the white youth in Hava Rachel Gordon's study relied on their statuses as minors to protect them from arrest during direct action; they felt they could take risks that adults could not. The youth of color in this study did not share this sentiment (Gordon 2010, 155–60). Importantly, the same adultist stereotypes that afford white youth extra protections also justify their infantilization (Ehrenreich, 310). The prospects of losing these protections and the hope of one day gaining rights may deter white youth from resisting adultism (Ehrenreich, 290; Gordon, 53). White youth see their lives projected onto the future whenever the adult world materially invests in their progression toward adulthood (Kafer 2013, 34). In this case, the price of having one's future humanity recognized is temporary self-negation.

These mechanisms of reinforcement may place pressure on individuals to *assimilate* to dominant group norms to avoid further subordination and, in turn, fuel within-community policing. For instance, the same individuals who defend the rights of transgender and nonbinary (TNB) adults to undergo a second round of pubertal changes may oppose the rights of young people to halt, delay, or override their "first" puberty. Here, adultism and cissexism reinforce one another by rendering this first puberty and, by default, an original commitment to cisnormativity universally essential. As I will show later, many TNB adults contribute to the spread of adultist ideologies that target TNB youth, seemingly to avoid being accused of immature, attention-seeking behaviors (Ehrenreich 2002, 283–316; Bell 1995, 1; DeJong and Love 2015, 490).

As well, individuals might leverage their privileged identities (e.g., white, adult, cisgender) to engage in acts of *compensatory subordination* against members of multiply subordinated subgroups (e.g., people of color, TNB individuals) within the larger oppressed group. Frank Rudy Cooper explained that these compensatory acts ultimately reinforce the *scaling of bodies*, or the "Western epistemological system of ranking identity characteristics against a norm and organizing society according to the resulting hierarchies" (Cooper 2006, 857).

When individuals compensate for their subordination by oppressing others, they automatically consent to the same epistemological framework that legitimizes their oppression. Finally, one's *investment in ideology* may obscure the "nature and sources of subordinating conditions" and the harm it causes to oneself (Ehrenreich 2002, 258). For an individual to remain unaware of their privileges, they must believe that others earned their mistreatment by refusing to assimilate or by acting in ways that warrant discipline; this belief reassures the privileged that they earned their advantages by behaving responsibly (Ehrenreich, 277–314).

Case Example I: Rapid-Onset Gender Dysphoria and Transtrenders

In recent years, increased tolerance for TNB identification has challenged the cissexist norms that once prevented young people from openly identifying as TNB. Youth have responded by embracing gender fluidity and promoting acceptance for TNB individuals. At the same time, the internet has opened possibilities for self-expression and community building among TNB youth, who previously lacked access to information about gender identity and expression. Many young people refer to themselves using unconventional gender pronouns, or *neopronouns* (e.g., xe/xem/xyr, ey/em/eir), and have adopted lesser-known identity labels to describe their gender identities (Feraday 2014). These changes within youth culture have given rise to an era of gender-critical paranoia among a diverse group of parents, scholars, and clinicians who, despite having profoundly different political agendas, have joined forces to oppose policies safeguarding the rights of TNB youth (Minnesota Family Council 2019).

Lisa Littman, a physician and professor at Brown University, is one such gender-critical scholar whose work has been cited in attempts to undermine growing support for TNB youths' rights. In 2018, Littman published the findings of a study that collected survey data from 256 parents who reported that their children exhibited the signs of a phenomenon that she and others have referred to as "rapid-onset gender dysphoria" (ROGD). The study was descriptive in tone and had the stated purpose of positing hypotheses about this new medical "condition" (Littman 2018, 2). Littman recruited her sample from websites that provided a space for parents to blog and post comments about ROGD and other gender-critical topics (2018, 5).[5] In her article, Littman defined ROGD as "adolescent-onset or late-onset gender dysphoria where the development of gender dysphoria is observed to begin suddenly during or after puberty in an adolescent or young adult who would not have met the criteria for gender dysphoria in childhood" (2018, 2).

ROGD is not a formal diagnosis endorsed by any medical association, and the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) board of directors recently released a position statement discouraging the use of such medicalized terms in the absence of sufficient empirical evidence (WPATH 2018). After receiving backlash for publishing the article, *PLOS ONE*'s editorial

team conducted a formal review of the original manuscript and issued a correction clarifying that ROGD should not be interpreted as a diagnosable condition (Littman 2019).[6] Although the correction did address concerns about the original article, its content remains accessible to the public and is still capable of causing harm.

In this section, I launch criticisms against ROGD and its proponents, discussing the adultist nature of gender-critical rhetoric and the role it plays in reinforcing the networks of observation and standards of normalizing judgment that adults use to discipline TNB youth (Foucault [1975] 1979, 171–84). I then turn to a discussion of how the adult gaze might encourage LGBTQ individuals to engage in behaviors that reflect the operation of symbiotic mechanisms. In so doing, I rely on media discourses (i.e., blog posts, online news articles, and YouTube videos) surrounding the concept of the *transtrender*, a derogatory term predominantly used to discredit young TNB individuals, to illustrate how these mechanisms reflect symbiotic ties between adultism and cissexism.

The Adultist Nature of ROGD

Before I home in on ROGD specifically, it is worth noting that all TNB identities are medicalized to some extent, given that many aspects of legal and medical transition do require a diagnosis of gender dysphoria (GD). GD is defined by the American Psychiatric Association as "a marked incongruence between one's experienced/expressed gender and assigned gender, of at least 6 months' duration . . . [causing] clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning" (2013, 452–53). Even though adults and adolescents must meet the same criteria to qualify for a diagnosis, adolescents' identities are typically more vulnerable to scrutiny from the gender-critical community, whose critiques of TNB youth reflect common stereotypes about young people, including that they "cannot be trusted," "are clannish," "are immature," and "have incomplete brains" (DeJong 2014, 132–39).

Indeed, some steps must be taken to ensure that TNB individuals are confident in their decisions regarding transition, but gender-critical discourse extends beyond valid concerns about life-altering choices and paints adolescents as altogether incapable of self-identification. Common to most critical commentary on GD among adolescents is the assumption that adults generally and the medical field specifically are more knowledgeable on GD than the TNB youth who experience it (Littman 2018, 34; Marchiano 2017, 358). Gender-critical adults frequently invoke clinical terminology to call into question youths' expertise regarding their identities. For example, Lisa Marchiano, a licensed clinical social worker, published an article castigating clinicians for being too eager to affirm youths' "self-diagnosis" of their GD, insinuating that youth must first have their gender identities authenticated by adult medical authorities to receive any validation at all (Marchiano, 346).

Littman's study suffered from this flaw as well. Her correction of the original article acknowledged that parents' reports alone do not sufficiently account for youths' experiences with GD and indicated the importance of collecting data from youth and their clinicians to corroborate findings (Littman 2019). However, she neglected to modify her interpretations of qualitative data, which still depict adults as the definitive bearers of truth about their children's lives. Her original statement that "adolescents may not be reliable historians and may have limited . . . insight about their own emotions" implies that adults' opinions should carry more weight regardless of whether youth are consulted (Littman 2018, 35). Her bias toward adults led her to conclude that her participants' children must have fabricated their personal histories simply because their parents disagreed with their narratives (Littman, 24–27).

Whether or not these youth misrepresented their histories, it seems unreasonable to immediately doubt the veracity of their accounts based on parents' reports alone. GD is a subjective experience that not all individuals understand or feel comfortable expressing or acting on until they reach adolescence or adulthood. Moreover, although clinicians are not required to consider whether their adolescent clients would have met the criteria for GD during childhood, some may still consider this factor in making a diagnosis. The fact that the criteria for GD in children rely so heavily on evidence of stereotypically masculine or feminine traits lends credence to the possibility that the children of the participants in Littman's study endorsed histories of stereotypical gender nonconformity to appeal to the clinicians, who serve as gatekeepers of transition-related healthcare. One of her participants reported that their child admitted to lying about her history for this very reason (Littman 2018, 25). It is important to remember that when cisgender youth express themselves in ways that do not align with their gender identities, medical professionals never question whether their identities are legitimate. TNB youth, on the other hand, must meet these unreasonable expectations to earn validation from others.

Finally, the current discourses on ROGD imply that youth are so deprived of independent thought and emotional intelligence that the only plausible explanations for their "rapid" onset of GD are social contagion and "maladaptive coping" (Littman 2018, 33–34). Both Marchiano and Littman demonstrated strong biases toward social contagion as the best explanation for the high incidence of TNB identification within the peer groups of TNB youth, even though there are a multitude of alternative explanations. Numerous studies have shown that being TNB is an isolating experience and that TNB youth benefit from forming connections with other TNB individuals, including via the internet, which many of Littman's participants criticized as having caused their children's GD (Mizock and Mueser 2014, 154; Saltzburg and Davis 2010, 95–100; Singh 2013, 698–99).

That Littman and others have interpreted community building among TNB youth as cultish rather than as a need for support echoes Keri DeJong's

finding that adults tend to stereotype young people as "clannish" (DeJong 2014, 139). Not unlike the sentiments expressed in *How Is This Not a Cult?*, a blog post that was published on 4thWaveNow, one of the websites from which Littman recruited her sample, these gender-critical opinions allude to the idea that a cult-like mentality may have deceived TNB youth into rejecting medical authority (4thWaveNow 2015). When reporting the findings of her study, for instance, Littman noted that several of her participants' children only trusted "information about gender dysphoria . . . from transgender websites and/or transgender people and sources" (Littman 2018, 23). In actuality, health and mental health providers have given the TNB community ample reasons not to trust their judgment, so it is understandable that youth would seek support and advice from individuals who share their experiences (Benson 2013, 29–31; James et al. 2016, 5). In sum, ROGD is an adultist, cissexist, pseudodiagnostic label that stems from widespread panic concerning recent shifts in youth culture.

ROGD as a Discipline of Panoptical Time

The recent medicalization of gender-critical discourse is worrisome, though not surprising. Western medical authorities have long observed and monitored oppressed peoples for evidence of their inferiority, noting characteristics that marked them as culturally or phenotypically different from white European males (DeJong and Love 2015, 496–97; Lesko 2001, 22–39). Before and during the Victorian era, races that organized their societies according to strict gender binaries and whose men and women exhibited gender-conforming behaviors were regarded as more civilized than those who adopted less essentialist views of gender (Lesko, 25). In many cases, European colonizers did not perceive colonized people to be sexually dimorphic given the presence of egalitarian gender relations within Indigenous cultures, many of which celebrated and acknowledged gender identifications and expressions outside of the binary (Lugones 2007, 195–96; Robinson 2019). For example, *hijras*, also known as *kothis* or *aravanis*, were recognized as a third sex in India until they were criminalized by British colonial law in the late 1800s (Patnaik 2017, 76–77). Anhiti Patnaik compared the criminalization of *hijras* under British colonial rule to other attempts by Victorian era authorities to bring deviant bodies under examination for signs of potential degeneracy (Patnaik, 81). Lesko argued that these fears of decline and degeneracy turned adolescents' bodies into "a terrain in which struggles over what would count as an adult, a woman, a man, rationality, proper sexuality, and orderly development were staged" (Lesko, 50).

The idea that there may now exist an epidemic that poses a threat to gender essentialism would trigger these old anxieties around social contagion and may even be used to justify increased monitoring and regulation of online spaces and efforts to limit access to gender-affirming medical interventions (Lesko 2001, 25–26; Foucault [1975] 1979, 143–44). These appeals to myths about social contagion also perpetuate the adultist assumption that youth make

unwise decisions and that monitoring from medical professionals is needed to keep them in check. For example, Marchiano wrote that "adults have allowed children to be seduced away into peril" and compared ROGD to other "psychic epidemics," including real-life historical accounts of mass disappearances of children during the fourteenth century as depicted in the Grimm's fairy tale, *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* (Marchiano 2017, 345–46). She described this story as a "disconcertingly apt metaphor for various social contagions that have overtaken collective life throughout centuries" (Marchiano, 345). Similarly, Littman characterized adolescence as an "almost universally tumultuous period," using the word "outbreak" to describe TNB identification throughout her article (2018, 25). Scholarly papers, blog posts, and online news articles have attributed much of the blame for this "outbreak" to spaces that are not stringently controlled and monitored by adults, such as social media websites (4thWaveNow 2015; Mawer 2014; Parents of ROGD Kids, n.d.; Tracinski 2018). As a result, adults have begun to target spaces where youth can exchange ideas about gender identity and expression away from the adult gaze to broaden their networks of observation and control (Foucault [1975] 1979, 143–77).

ROGD reinforces standards for normalizing judgment that lack empirical support but are nevertheless presented as facts so that attempts to control youth within the context of panoptical time seem rational and grounded in scientific reasoning (Foucault [1975] 1979, 177–84; Lesko 2001, 100). Adults who have sounded the alarm about ROGD employ a "sequential model of age stratification" that associates early childhood with gender identity development and adolescence with sexual identity development (Angelides 2004, 163). For instance, Littman claimed that youth with ROGD represent a subgroup whose characteristics deviate from that which is currently known about TNB youth, comparing their identity development to a normative developmental trajectory primarily constructed by cisgender adults. She based this argument on the fact that the youth did not display clinically significant symptoms of GD during childhood (Littman 2018, 30–31). This observation, whether true or not, seems irrelevant given that evidence of GD during childhood is not a criterion for having GD in adolescence (American Psychiatric Association 2013, 452–53). It is plausible that the onset of pubertal changes may have triggered symptoms of GD that would not have been noticeable before the development of secondary sex characteristics. Regardless, this argument indicates that standards for youth are based on their development through time; labeling certain developmental trajectories as abnormal creates a need to monitor youth for symptoms of abnormality (Lesko, 111–20).

Littman also stated that the findings of prior studies, which showed associations between medical transition and mental health improvements among adolescents, could not be generalized to the ROGD population because these studies sampled youth who first experienced GD during childhood (Littman 2018, 3). However, Annelou L. C. de Vries et al.'s study, which Littman cited to

support this claim, did not specify the times at which participants first demonstrated GD symptoms. De Vries et al. only reported ages at initial assessment, which ranged from 11.1 to 17.0 years (2014, 2–3). Littman also misrepresented the work of de Vries and Scott Leibowitz, which she referenced as evidence that ROGD youth display characteristics that differ from the current scientific consensus on GD (Leibowitz and de Vries 2016). These authors emphasized diversity in adolescents' experiences with GD, suggesting that the patterns Littman described as abnormal (e.g., higher rates of adolescents assigned female at birth accessing gender identity clinics) are actually typical according to data collected over the past twelve years (Littman 2018, 2; Leibowitz and de Vries 2016, 21–23). In particular, Littman stated that "prior to 2012, there were no [*sic*] little to no research studies about adolescent females with gender dysphoria first beginning in adolescence" (2018, 3). What Littman does not explain is that the authors who conducted the studies cited by Leibowitz and de Vries showed a higher ratio of youth assigned female at birth starting in 2006—long before the emergence of social media websites like Tumblr, which Littman identified as a contributor to the pattern she described as "statistically unlikely based on previous research" (Leibowitz and de Vries, 1; Littman, 2).[7]

Overall, Littman's and Marchiano's articles propose standards for normalizing judgment that label characteristics typically associated with TNB youth as abnormal and attention-seeking (Foucault [1975] 1979, 177–84). Littman's suggestion that youth might choose to be TNB for popularity and attention (2018, 16–20) is particularly illogical given that anti-transgender hate speech in schools has increased substantially in recent years and that TNB youth experience more harassment at school than any other member of the LGBTQ community (Kosciw et al. 2018, 92–121). Nevertheless, such accusations are damaging to TNB individuals regardless of how illogical they are. They tap into long-standing insecurities about legitimacy and authenticity that stem from the need to justify transness to dominant society. These efforts to gain acceptance have led the TNB community to sanction individuals who do not fit the image of palatable transness (i.e., binary, cisgender-passing) (Hall and DeLaney 2019, 15).

In cases when an individual's status as a minor cannot be called on to deny them their right to self-identify, developmental age may stand in for chronological age. These ableist tactics serve to reinforce adultism by applying adultist assumptions to individuals who typically escape these assumptions. For example, Kathleen Levinstein, a cisgender parent of a transgender autistic son who has identified herself as the only autistic PhD-level social worker in the world, has spoken out against what she views as a concerted effort by the "trans-medical-industrial complex" to sterilize "autistic women" by subjecting them to gender-affirming treatments (Deep Green Resistance 2017, 6:24). She misgendered her child throughout her interview with Deep Green Resistance, citing sensory processing issues, gender nonconformity due to higher levels of testosterone in autistic bodies,

and social contagion as explanations for her child's transness. She also cited her child's developmental age of 9 years old as a reason why he should not be permitted to make decisions regarding his transition, even though her description of her son's GD does not align with these arguments (Deep Green Resistance, 11:34). Nine-year-old individuals do not typically desire secondary sex characteristics like facial hair, nor do autistic people generally describe their sensory discomfort as a need to be gendered in a particular way (Deep Green Resistance, 11:23).

Although Levinstein's concerns about her son's medical issues in response to testosterone are valid, many of her other arguments are not (Deep Green Resistance, 11:12). For example, she claimed that the APA requires one year of mental health therapy prior to being approved for gender-affirming surgeries and that testosterone use in transmasculine people is associated with heightened risk of bone loss and early heart attacks (Deep Green Resistance, 8:03; 4thWaveNow 2016). All of the major guidelines, including those published by the American Psychological Association (2009) and WPATH (2012) require twelve months of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) prior to surgery—not mental health therapy. Furthermore, little to no evidence exists that testosterone causes bone loss or early heart attacks among transmasculine people; in fact, researchers posit that testosterone likely protects against bone loss in transmasculine individuals (Rothman and Iwamoto 2019; Irwig 2018).

In conclusion, ROGD reinforces pressures to assimilate, which in turn encourage investment in dominant ideologies, exclusion of non-assimilating members of the community, and compensatory subordination in the form of within-group policing. These pressures to assimilate or hide aspects of one's identity may be even greater for individuals who are racialized or labeled as developmentally disabled, especially autistic people given the presumed link between transness and autism (Robinson 2019, 10–11; Shapira and Granek 2019; Thrower et al. 2020). The next section will focus on one outgrowth of these mechanisms, the transtrender, to exemplify the potential impacts of adultist gender-critical discourses on the TNB community as a whole.

The Transtrender as a Product of Symbiotic Mechanisms

According to the top definition listed on Urban Dictionary,

> a transtrender is a person (usually between the ages of 9 and 18) who calls themselves a transgender person because they think it makes them cool or special. . . . They also usually use ridiculous, impracticle [*sic*] neopronouns or nounself pronouns, and often the gender they identify with isn't even a valid gender (e.g. "stargender," "ferngender"). . . . Transtrenders are incredibly disrespectful to real transgender people, making a mockery of what transgender people experience, invalidating the problems and hurt that real transgender people face, and turning these people's identity into a fashion trend (trans-apple 2015).

This slur specifically targets youth who, due to greater access to peer support via the internet and an increasingly tolerant society, have started to become more comfortable exploring their gender identities (Conrad, n.d.; Entropy 2018; Marsh and Readers 2016). A blogger with the username Entropy, whose age is unknown, called for the TNB community to stop "calling people out for being a transtrender just because they're following the norms of their generation, or the styles for that particular decade," adding further support for the idea that the word transtrender is an adultist slur and an attack on youth culture.

Those whose gender identities do not adhere to the binary or whose experiences of GD do not reflect gender essentialist views about the embodiment and expression of gender are especially susceptible to being labeled as transtrenders (Conrad, n.d.). According to Christine Feraday's study on neopronouns, "the 'trendiness' argument against neo-identities is related to the characterization of people who use . . . [them] as spoiled, oversensitive, and self-absorbed young people" (Feraday 2014, 36). Therefore, it seems that the creation of a slur like transtrender, which has undoubtedly gained momentum from adults' participation in discourses about ROGD and related issues, has produced a pressure to assimilate to concepts of transness as defined by institutional authorities (Fisher 2018).

Evidence of transtrender labeling as a widespread phenomenon and acts of compensatory subordination as a typical response to it can be found on YouTube, where there are several channels dedicated to this topic (Workman 2018; Garrah 2018; Ryan 2018; ThatGuyOli 2018). For instance, Kalvin Garrah, who was 17 years old when he posted some of his most popular content, has made several videos on this topic, with "Trans Guy Reacts to CRAZY Transtrender" garnering almost 2.2 million views when the video was still publicly available on YouTube. As demonstrated by the like (87,000) to dislike (11,000) ratio of this video and the comments people have written in response to it, most viewers approve of this type of content and do not view it as harassment or bullying.[8] Many of the targets of this type of harassment are young people challenging the gender binary as acts of resistance against white supremacy and ableism, and some have reported experiencing suicidality or symptoms of post-traumatic stress as a result of this harassment (Garrah 2019a, 2019b; CopsHateMoe 2021). These types of reaction videos can lead to the original poster's content being preserved online indefinitely, even if they delete their account or remove the original video from the internet (Manning and Stern 2018, 217–18). The threat of having one's public humiliation kept as a permanent record is such a powerful mechanism of control that institutional authorities would not have to do anything to ensure that TNB individuals conform to a normalized model of gender identity; the TNB community accomplishes this task for them (Manning and Stern, 217–18; Barton 2011, 72; Foucault [1975] 1979, 202–17).

It is understandable that symbiotic mechanisms would emerge in a climate where youths' identities are subject to policing by adults and require authentication by medical authorities. Adults and youth alike may buy into ideologies that

sanction gender identity and expression within the context of panoptical time because they want to believe that they are protected from a slur that predominantly threatens the younger population (Ehrenreich 2002, 313–36; Entropy 2018; Risman 2017). For example, even TNB youth who transitioned in their teens or early twenties have spoken out against transitioning at a young age in their YouTube videos, implying that they are somehow an exception to this rule because "you can definitely tell who's . . . a legit trans person" and, therefore, it is possible to differentiate between youth who should or should not have access to gender-affirming interventions (London 2018, 12:55; Grant 2017b).[9] Ella Grant, a trans YouTuber who was 17 years old at the time she posted her video, stated that GD "is diagnosable. It is visible. It is something real—that transtrenders do not have" (Grant 2017a, 1:44). These comments suggest that some TNB individuals invest in a system of classification that supports their gender identities as valid, but that screens out transtrenders as invalid based on observable characteristics (Ehrenreich, 313–36). They also suggest that youth may adopt the language of adult medical authorities to gain acknowledgment and acceptance (Fanon [1952] 2008, 1–21).

TNB individuals may engage in acts of compensatory subordination to distance themselves from the transtrender label because they believe that transtrenders "are the reason why a lot of people won't believe that trans people are actually real and what they're going through is real" (Ehrenreich 2002, 276–316; London 2017, 4:09).[10] Blaire White, an adult transgender woman, summed up this sentiment perfectly in her YouTube video titled "This Is Why People Don't Like Trans People": "I personally sometimes feel like I'm just drowning in this huge crowd of t******* who are screaming and crying about 97 genders, and I'm just in the back like, 'I'm not one of them'" (White 2017, 1:27). Individuals who reinforce the normative narrative of transness to cope with pressures to assimilate often call themselves *transmedicalists* or *truscum* (Feraday 2014, 39). They fear that appearing unacceptable to cisgender people will result in a loss of protection or rights, so they use their privilege in one area (e.g., age, binary identification, ability to pass as cisgender) to reject labels (e.g., NB, use of neopronouns) associated with unpalatable members of the community (Feraday, 39–40; Ehrenreich, 276–316). In the process, they unwittingly reinforce ideologies that oppress the TNB community, such as the idea that cisgender people should have the authority to dictate TNB identification and expression (Ehrenreich, 291–98; Feraday, 40). When TNB individuals confirm the existence of fake identities, they justify the scrutiny that the entire community faces from health professionals and other gatekeepers.

Case Example II: The It Gets Better Project

The IGBP was a storytelling campaign that began in 2010 when Dan Savage, a well-known journalist who has written numerous columns about sex, and his

spouse, Terry Miller, uploaded a video to YouTube in response to the media attention surrounding several queer youth who died by suicide due to the bullying they endured at school (Gal et al. 2016, 1). In the video, the two men discussed the harassment they faced during high school as gay males living in intolerant environments (IGBP 2010). This story, and all the posts from other people that followed the original video, ended with accounts of how life improved for the storytellers after they left high school and entered adulthood. The IGBP used the tagline "it gets better" to urge youth to "tough this period of [life] out" (IGBP 2010, 1:39) so that they could one day experience true happiness. In this section, I critique the IGBP for its reliance on adultist rhetoric and use as a discipline of panoptical time. I discuss footage from the videos and findings from previous studies, which systematically analyzed these videos and explored youths' responses to them, to demonstrate the mechanisms that contribute to adultist behaviors among supposed adult allies.

The Adultist Nature of the IGBP

First, the IGBP presents a message that is presumptuous and condescending. The adult participants in the storytelling campaign seem to believe that they understand the hardships associated with being teenagers in contemporary society and have enough wisdom to give advice on how to overcome them. One member of Feather Boa Fathers, a support group for gay adoptive fathers, provided the following advice in their video: "Don't give up. Don't let other people tell you what to think or do, and you'll be in great shape" (Knight 2010, 4:35). This advice is generic and does nothing but perpetuate the assumption that young people automatically succumb to pressure from others (Lesko 2001, 4).

Second, the IGBP marginalizes youth voices and normalizes youths' powerlessness. Several commentators on the IGBP's shortcomings, including youth themselves, have criticized the IGBP for failing to problematize the fact that only adults have the power to improve the conditions of youths' existences (Craig et al. 2014, 209–11; DeJong and Love 2015, 493). For example, the youth in Shelley L. Craig et al.'s study recommended that the IGBP make more of an effort to include youths' voices. They posited that feelings of powerlessness due to not having a voice might have contributed to increased rates of suicidality among LGBTQ youth (Craig et al., 210). The majority of these videos rest on the assumption that adults *should* have more agency than youth due to their higher levels of maturity and competence. In my own descriptive analysis of the IGBP movement's YouTube channel, I found that only seven of the 255 videos they posted between September 2010 and December 2020 featured youth as change agents. As will be demonstrated in the next section, the adult participants in the IGBP would not have been able to assign to adulthood a status of superiority outside of the context of panoptical time wherein youth are already positioned as naturally inferior to adults (DeJong and Love, 496).

The IGBP as a Discipline of Panoptical Time

The IGBP is both illustrative of how instruments of discipline operate through panoptical time and a product of the techniques of distribution that provide structure for panoptical time. Most of the project's activities took place over the internet, where adults who participated in the campaign were being watched by other adults (Gal et al. 2016, 3). As a result, the IGBP was, at least partially, a performance by adults for adults whose collective gaze acted as an instrument of normalizing judgment (Foucault [1975] 1979, 177–84). For example, Gal et al.'s study revealed that videos that diverged from the preestablished norm (e.g., a video titled "It doesn't get better") were typically punished by high rates of dislikes from their viewers (Gal et al. 2016, 10).

Not only does the adult gaze serve to discipline the behaviors of adults, but it also satisfies the adult desire for a romanticized version of adulthood that glorifies the process of *becoming* an adult rather than *being* a youth, and relegates adolescence to an inferior position in time (Gordon 2010, 90–94; Lesko 2001, 110–32). The IGBP featured many adult creators whose sole purpose for creating a video seemed to be to brag about how great it was to be an adult and how awful it was to be a youth (Meyer 2017). In the words of one couple who participated in the campaign, "it sucks when you're young. It gets better. Patience is key. . . . It's improved for all of us who have just stuck it out" (Arboreality 2010, 0:11).

Youths' lives take place within the confines of enclosed spaces where adults regulate how they use their bodies and minds each moment of the day. Within these stifling and meticulously partitioned enclosures, youth live constantly supervised existences that grant them limited rights to make decisions in their own interests or to self-identify without approval from adults (Foucault [1975] 1979, 141–43). Given that these conditions render youth vulnerable to coercion and abuse from which they can only escape through adult intervention, it is understandable that the IGBP would base its strategies on the notion that for youth exposed to hostile environments, the only option is to wait passively for adulthood (DeJong and Love 2015, 494; Gordon 2010, 8–10; Lesko 2001, 123–37). The youth in Craig et al.'s study noticed this issue as well, criticizing the project for failing to equip them with tools that would help them resolve their issues and for assuming that their lives would automatically improve "just by virtue of more age" (Craig et al. 2014, 209).

Overall, the IGBP serves as evidence that adults continue to look "everywhere but in the present social relations for the explanation [to adolescents' problems, letting] . . . adults and scientists off the hook" (Lesko 2001, 90). "Adults are people who *are*, adolescents *will be* in the future" (Lesko, 129). Instead of advocating for any administrative changes within schools that would require adults to rally around campaigns to dismantle adultism as a system of oppression, the IGBP looks to the future as the solution, speaking to future adults rather than current youth (Gordon 2010, 8–10). The following dialogue demonstrates how the messages in these videos are not well-suited to a young audience:

> Lee: "Then I started teaching, and I wanted to be out . . . but I wasn't anticipating how much harassment I would receive from people's perceptions of my gender presentation. Pretty awful, violent, emotionally ridiculous stuff. . . ."
> Bara: "And they love you! In the end, they—you know, well, you had to get out of that terrible school, but you found a good place" (Brown 2010, 2:26).

This quote illustrates how symbiotic mechanisms—namely, the exclusion of youths' rights from efforts to combat anti-LGBTQ oppression—influenced the behavior of adult contributors to the IGBP. Lee and Bara's failure to recognize the adultism that made Lee's escape from the school possible sends the message that homophobic and transphobic violence in youth-serving institutions is acceptable as long as it does not impact adults.

The Role of Symbiosis

Not only does the IGBP exclude youths' rights in general, but it also operates through the exclusion of marginalized youth subgroups, such as TNB youth, youth of color, and those of lower socioeconomic statuses (Craig et al. 2014, 210; Ehrenreich 2002, 281–83; Meyer 2017). The IGBP depicts successful LGBTQ adults as those who achieve middle- to upper-class status or who take part in activities made possible by forms of capital to which economically disadvantaged youth may not have access (Meyer, 119–22). The classist and adultist language in these videos suggests that some adults are engaging in acts of compensatory subordination by accessing their class privilege and adult status to compensate for their oppression as LGBTQ individuals (Ehrenreich, 276–85). The homonormative trajectories of successful adulthood that these stories put forth serve as fodder for acts of normalizing judgment, erasing and simplifying the injustices that contribute to youths' material conditions, such as cases in which families withdraw their financial support due to anti-LGBTQ bigotry (Craig et al., 212; Foucault [1975] 1979, 177–84; Meyer 2017). As long as LGBTQ youths' issues are framed as middle- to upper-class issues, heterosexism and cissexism will continue to exist in contexts that impact low-income communities (Ehrenreich, 281–82).

One video featuring an older lesbian couple exposes the type of lifestyle that LGBTQ youth must achieve to gain acceptance within their communities:

> Mary: "We interact with teachers and a principal who tells us whenever we see her that she just loves her lesbian couples and her lesbian families because they go the extra mile. . . ."
>
> Jeannie: Our little one is in a church-run preschool daycare, and it's the same thing. We are fully active in all the school activities for both girls. We do all the volunteer work. We go into the classrooms. We go on the field trips. And they all love us" (JDDiClementi 2011, 2:32).

In other words, one must have a flexible, well-paying career and freedom from other responsibilities to attain such a high level of parental involvement. Those

without access to these resources cannot "go the extra mile" to appear palatable to a predominantly cisgender, heterosexual community.

These discourses also reflect adults' investment in the ideology of "neoliberal agency" (Gershon 2011), as evidenced by the degree to which these videos focused on classist, meritocratic indicators of future success (e.g., getting a good job, traveling overseas) (Meyer, 2017, 119–22). Ideological investment in neoliberalism reassures adults that they have truly earned their success and capacity for self-management through age and hard work, rather than through inequitable structures that afford them more power relative to those who face age-, race-, or class-based oppression (Ehrenreich 2002, 313–36; Gershon 2011). This type of rhetoric sends the message that LGBTQ youth must adapt to oppressive conditions by moving away from their homes and finding more tolerant places to live (Meyer, 121).

Rather than proposing solutions that would alter the structure of oppressive institutions, the IGBP normalizes the presence of cissexism and heterosexism within educational environments (Meyer 2017, 118–23). Even though some of these videos, including the original IGBP video, mention issues caused by adults (e.g., family rejection), the overarching theme is that bullying from peers is the primary issue that LGBTQ youth face. These videos reflect adults' ideological investment in blaming youth for their own problems instead of changing circumstances within their control, such as administrative policies and family dynamics (Conner et al. 2016, 5; Meyer, 118). For example, family rejection has been found to predict suicide attempts among TNB individuals in adulthood, yet the IGBP fails to center this problem as a public health concern (Klein and Golub 2016, 195).

Adopting an Anti-Adultist Praxis

This critique adds to the emerging body of literature on adultism and echoes the works of others who have recommended anti-adultist practices as a means of advocating for youths' rights, specifically within the contexts of heterosexism, cissexism, racism, and other forms of oppression (Singh 2013, 696–700). This article also presents a case for integrating a focus on adultism into anti-oppressive scholarship and practice, as one of its major premises is that the rights of an oppressed group—the LGBTQ community—are contingent on the rights of its younger members. Given that adultism reinforces the subordination of LGBTQ individuals by normalizing heterosexism and cissexism in contexts specific to youth, attacking adultism could trigger a much more substantial revolution and advance LGBTQ interests in a variety of ways (Ehrenreich 2002, 280).

First, discourses on ROGD and transtrenders pathologize what could otherwise be considered healthy forms of gender expression for TNB individuals of all ages—not just youth. For example, Marchiano used her discussion on ROGD to discount TNB identities and the medical necessity of gender-affirming

interventions altogether, constructing both medical and social transition as risky and problematic (Marchiano 2017, 348–52). She conflated GD with feelings of discomfort toward gender stereotypes and suggested a shift away from medical transition toward acceptance of "the material reality of the body while encouraging people to express themselves and their gendered feelings in whatever way they like" (Marchiano, 350). Thus, it is becoming increasingly essential to understand how adultism might place LGBTQ individuals of all ages at risk of losing their rights.

Second, the above discussion on the IGBP demonstrates the need for adult professionals to advocate for youths' rights—especially those who work in schools, which currently treat youth as passive "citizens-in-the-making" (Gordon 2010, 10) and normalize dynamics that are fundamentally heterosexist, racist, ableist, sexist, and cissexist (Meyer 2017, 118–19). Although teachers can serve as allies, they often have little power to override the opinions of legal guardians and administrators and are themselves subject to surveillance and discipline (Gordon, 90–94). Any adults who dare to elevate the voices of youth, especially TNB youth, run the risk of being labeled as incompetent professionals who have permitted social contagions to proliferate (Foucault [1975] 1979, 204). Nevertheless, adult allies could help youth overcome the symbiotic matrix of oppressions that makes it difficult for LGBTQ youth to resist any single subordinating system (Ehrenreich 2002, 283–87). The high rate of LGBTQ youth who have become homeless, often due to family rejection, exemplifies how youths' dependence on adults makes challenging heterosexism and cissexism especially risky (Choi et al. 2015, 4).

Third, adultist efforts to discipline LGBTQ youths' identities by limiting and controlling their access to online spaces could have detrimental impacts on youth given that online peer support networks may promote resilience among TNB youth and protect against adverse outcomes (Johns et al. 2018; Singh 2013, 698–99). Adults must consider the consequences of promoting stigmatizing labels such as ROGD. For example, TNB youth who decide against HRT are often criticized and labeled as transtrenders. If Littman, Marchiano, and other proponents of ROGD are worried about youth rushing into decisions about transition, they should examine how their use of stigmatizing language might encourage within-group policing that would place pressure on youth to make hasty decisions (Fisher 2018; Jasper-Jay 2018; Yi 2015; Ehrenreich 2002, 287–303). The transtrender phenomenon makes it evident that TNB youth are aware of the scrutiny they are facing.

Fourth, an intersectional critique of adultism is crucial to understanding the myriad ways in which childhood and adolescence function as sites "of naturalized discipline, violence, and criminality" (Rollo 2018, 310). For example, a study by Phillip Atiba Goff et al. revealed that the dehumanization of Black youth was associated with perceptions among their predominantly white sample that Black adolescents were less essentially childlike, and thus more and less deserving of

state violence and protection, respectively (Goff et al. 2014). These attitudes predicted real racial disparities in police officers' use of force against youth. Scholars like Toby Rollo have made the opposite claim that Black people of all ages are treated like perpetual children, while white youth are granted some adult privileges based on their future adult statuses (Rollo 2018). I would argue that an alternative interpretation of Rollo's argument may better explain these differences in how white and Black youth are treated. Perhaps it is not white youth who are granted adult privileges but their parents. The corollary to Rollo's argument that Black people never achieve full adulthood is that Black parents are not treated as full adults with authority over their children's bodies, and that agents of the state reserve the right to discipline and punish both Black adults and their children. These hunches are supported by studies that point to widening racial disproportionalities at different stages along the child welfare pipeline (Harris and Hackett 2008).

Finally, although they were not the focus of this discussion, several adults have spoken out against the gender-critical rhetoric and exclusionary behaviors described in this paper, including via YouTube (Wilkins 2020; Ross 2016; Wynn 2019). Chase Ross's Trans Enough Project, which was designed to combat the invalidating language that led to the birth of the transtrender as a phenomenon, is but one example. However, very few of these adults have openly admitted that these harmful discourses disproportionately target youth. I hope that this article has demonstrated that not only do youth bear the brunt of the stigma and skepticism that LGBTQ people face, but that the LGBTQ community as a whole has a personal stake in furthering the interests of its younger members.

Seventy F. Hall*'s work focuses on how the intersectional influences of adultism, heterosexism, and cissexism combine to push LGBTQ youth out of their familial homes and often into one of two trajectories: foster care or homelessness. His philosophical orientation borrows from the critical youth studies literature and incorporates an emphasis on adultism as a factor that both contributes to disproportionality among homeless and child welfare–involved LGBTQ youth and shapes their experiences and trajectories. Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Seventy F. Hall, University at Buffalo School of Social Work, 685 Baldy Hall, Buffalo, NY 14260. Seventy can also be reached via email at sfhall@buffalo.edu or phone at (443) 414-1832.*

Notes

1. "Cissexism is discrimination against individuals who identify with and/or present as a different sex [and/or] gender than assigned at birth and privilege [afforded to] individuals who identify with and/or present as the same sex [and/or] gender as assigned at birth. . . . Cissexism is the outcome of a belief that biological sex and gender fall into only two categories in a fixed and binary system: male/masculine and female/feminine.

Following from this construction, cissexism represents individuals who identify with their birth sex and gender—cissexual and cisgender individuals—as normal and healthy, while those who do not identify as such are represented as deviant and sick" (Hibbs 2014). "Heterosexism refers to the cultural ideology that reproduces the normative and privileged status of heterosexuality in most aspects of people's lives, vilifying and stigmatizing nonheterosexual . . . behaviors, identities, relationships, and communities. Heterosexism includes institutionalized negative attitudes and beliefs about [LGBQ] sexualities as inferior, unnatural, and deviant, thereby reproducing sexual stigma" (Rumens 2016).

2. The quote in this sentence was taken from Susan Talburt's article (Talburt 2004).

3. Hierarchical observation is referred to as *networks of observation* throughout the remainder of the text to reflect the fact that "the network of gazes" that characterizes this instrument of discipline does not necessarily have a formal hierarchical structure within the context of the panopticon (Foucault [1975] 1979, 170–77).

4. I have retained the antiquated term "homosexual" to reflect the attitudes of the time period.

5. See Rebecca Reilly-Cooper's website (https://rebeccarc.com/) for an example of gender-critical rhetoric.

6. All references to Littman pertain to the original 2018 article unless stated otherwise.

7. For more information, consult the original study by Madison Aitken et al. (2015).

8. This video has since been deleted by the creator due to shifts in the discourse around transtrenders. Some young people, including the target of Garrah's first video, Brennen Beckwith, have begun to speak out against this type of harassment (Beckwith 2020).

9. The quote in this sentence was taken from Miss London's video. It should be noted that Miss London recently spoke out in defense of TNB individuals who transition during adolescence in a video titled "In Defense of Trans Kids" (London 2019).

10. Same as above.

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