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Night Falls Fast: Preventing Suicide in Trans* Youth

Beijing +20: Women and Health

CEDAW: Articles 1, 2 - Discrimination, Policies

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“I’ve been dropped into all this from another world and I can’t speak your language any longer. See the signs I try to make with my hands and fingers. See the vague movements of my lips among the sheets. I’m a blank spot in a hectic civilization. I’m a dark smudge in the air that dissipates without notice. I feel like a window, maybe a broken window. I am a glass human. I am a glass human disappearing in rain. I am standing among all of you waving my invisible arms and hands. I am shouting my invisible words. I am getting so weary. I am growing tired. I am waving to you from here. I am crawling around looking for the aperture of complete and final emptiness. I am vibrating in isolation among you. I am screaming but it comes out like pieces of clear ice. I am signaling that the volume of all this is too high. I am waving. I am waving my hands. I am disappearing. I am disappearing but not fast enough.”

David Wojnarowicz,
from Memories That Smell Like Gasoline



LEELAH'S STORY

Leelah Alcorn was born in November 1997, the second of four children raised in what she described as a “conservative Christian household” in Ohio (Fantz, 2015). Her parents, Doug and Carla, were avid churchgoers, and regularly brought Leelah and her siblings along to services at the local Northeast Church of Christ in Cincinnati. The family was well-known and respected among other members of their congregation; they were even featured in a 2011 profile of the church in *The Christian Chronicle* (Dockterman, 2014).

Shortly after the publication of that article, Leelah Alcorn’s life changed dramatically. It was around this time that 14-year-old Leelah, whose parents had given her the name Joshua Ryan Alcorn at birth, first stumbled across the term “transgender” in an internet search (Margolin, 2015).

Leelah, who later wrote that she had felt “like a girl trapped in a boy’s body” since the age of four, finally had a framework within which to begin to understand her identity (Johnston, 2014). And so she started to piece it together. Leelah reached out to another trans* student she’d met at Kings High. She scoured internet blogs and support groups and conversation forums. She used the popular website Tumblr to start her own blog, “Lazer Princess,” and wrote extensively about her life as a trans* teenager (Fantz, 2015).

Based on Leelah’s posts and the ones she chose to “re-blog,” she was a big fan of feminism, Sailor Moon, and stockings with cats on them (Fantz, 2015). Leelah was also a talented musician and artist. Last spring she applied to work as a caricaturist at Kings Island, a local amusement park, and her talent quickly became evident to everyone around her. “Her work was the best of any new employee,” said Abby Jones, one of Leelah’s coworkers and close friends (Dockterman, 2014).

Although Leelah excelled as an artist and student (one of her former teachers described her as a “voracious reader”), and seemed to be coming to terms with her identity, some aspects of her life were quickly deteriorating – especially her relationship with her parents (Fantz, 2015). After Leelah asked them to begin transition treatments at 16, Doug and Carla refused, sending her instead to Christian conversion therapy. Later, when Leelah professed her gender identity to some of her classmates, her parents forced her to withdraw from school and cut off her access to social media. They no longer allowed her to spend time with friends or neighbors. In an interview with Time Magazine, Annie Davis, a neighbor of the Alcorns for fourteen years, said: “Leelah was not allowed to hang out with my son after she came out as gay....I knew this wasn’t a good thing. Isolation is never a good thing” (Dockterman, 2014).

Leelah blogged about the experience on Tumblr: “This was probably the part of my life when I was the most depressed, and I’m surprised I didn’t kill myself. I was completely alone for 5 months. No friends, no support, no love. Just my parents’ disappointment and the cruelty of loneliness” (Fantz, 2015).



The weight of her isolation soon became too much to bear. Leelah penned one last blog, in which she expressed anger toward her parents for refusing to accept her and encouraged other parents to love their children unconditionally, regardless of their gender identity:

“When I was 14, I learned what transgender meant and cried of happiness. After 10 years of confusion I finally understood who I was. I immediately told my mom, and she reacted extremely negatively, telling me that it was a phase, that I would never truly be a girl, that God doesn't make mistakes, that I am wrong. If you are reading this, parents, *please* don't tell this to your kids. Even if you are Christian or are against transgender people don't ever say that to someone, especially your kid. That won't do anything but make them hate [themselves]. That's exactly what it did to me.”

In the blog's closing paragraphs, Leelah wrote:

“I have decided I've had enough. I'm never going to transition successfully....I'm never going to be happy with the way I look or sound....I'm never going to have enough love to satisfy me. I'm never going to find a man who loves me. I'm never going to be happy.”

Leelah set the blog to post automatically later that day and then slipped out of her parents' house, trudging four miles through the woods to Interstate 71 in the middle of the night. It was December 28th of 2014 – just two weeks ago as I write this. I imagine Leelah standing at the edge of the highway, shivering, her arms clasped in front of her chest as cars roared past, blasting gusts of wind in her face. Her jaw set, resolute, as she stepped into the path of an oncoming tractor-trailer and was killed instantly.

INTRODUCTION

Stories like Leelah's are not unusual: Across the world, trans* people face extreme social and economic marginalization every day, and in every context imaginable: in their family homes, in school, in the workplace, in doctors' office and emergency rooms, before police officers and landlords, while simply walking down the street (see Clements-Nolle, Marx, & Katz, 2006a; Lombardi, Wilchins, Priesing, & Malouf, 2001; Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012).

In an attempt to bring these abuses to light, the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLT) joined forces to write “Injustice At Every Turn” - a report of trans* discrimination based on more than 6,000 surveys of trans* and gender non-conforming participants from across the United States (Grant et al., 2011).

The results were shattering. A full 63 percent of participants reported having experienced serious acts of discrimination – defined as “events that would have a major impact on a person's quality of



life and ability to sustain themselves financially or emotionally.” These events included the following:

- lost job due to bias
- eviction due to bias
- school bullying/harassment so severe respondent had to drop out
- teacher bullying
- physical assault due to bias
- sexual assault due to bias
- homelessness because of gender identity/expression
- lost relationship with partner or children due to gender identity/expression
- denial of medical service due to bias
- incarceration due to gender identity/expression

In the report’s executive summary, its authors note other overarching themes that emerged from their research. Though discrimination against trans* individuals was pervasive throughout the sample, its impact was especially nefarious when combined with structural racism. “People of color,” the authors write, “in general fare worse than white participants across the board, with African American transgender respondents faring worse than all others in many areas examined” (Grant et al., 2011). In addition to documenting the harmful effects of joint trans*/race-based discrimination, the report found that respondents lived, on average, in relative poverty. A full 15 percent – more than four times the national average – reside in households with combined annual incomes under \$10,000 (Grant et al., 2011).

Perhaps most troubling is the extent to which acts of violence are committed against members of the trans* community. 51 percent of respondents were harassed or bullied in school, while 64% were the victims of sexual assault. Harassment in school is often so severe that students are forced to drop out – this was true for a full one-sixth of survey respondents (Grant et al., 2011).

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The sheer number of issues facing the trans* community is overwhelming. From harassment and discrimination in education and employment, to economic insecurity, housing discrimination, and homelessness; from discrimination in health care and poor health outcomes, to discrimination in public accommodations and barriers to receiving identification documents, there are simply too many to list here. They fall beyond the scope of this paper. I couldn’t scratch the surface of the dizzying array of injustices faced by trans* people.

Instead, I will focus on a single issue: the prevalence of suicide attempts among trans* youth. According to “Injustice at Every Turn,” a staggering 41 percent of respondents reported attempting suicide. *41 percent* – that’s more than 10 times the national average (Grant et al., 2011).



Why are so many young trans* people taking their lives? Why aren't more people talking about it? What measures can be taken to reverse this troubling trend, to make trans*students feel loved and accepted and that their lives matter, that their lives are worth living?

In this paper, I will explore the root causes behind the horrible phenomenon of trans* youth suicide, as well as local, national, and global efforts to address this issue. I will explore this issue in the context of the Beijing Platform for Action, and note what progress has been made in the twenty years since this document was produced.

DEFINING TRANS* AND RELATED TERMS

Before we begin, it is useful to consider the meanings of trans*-related terminology. The term transgender is commonly used to encompass the range of people who express their gender beyond the male-female binary (Nadal, 2013). However, many scholars and activists have begun using the term trans* instead. By removing -gender, which calls to mind images of men or women, trans*, some argue, might help transcend the gender binary and better represent people who fall somewhere in the middle, or who move back and forth, or who don't identify with the binary at all (Ryan, 2014).

Here is a table of important trans*-related terminology. It is adapted from a list provided by the National Center for Transgender Equality.

Term	Meaning
Transgender	a term for people whose gender identity, expression, or behavior is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth
Transgender man	a trans* individual who currently identifies as a man
Transgender woman	a trans* individual who currently identifies as a woman
Gender identity	an individual's internal sense of being male, female, or something else; it is not visible to others
Gender expression	The manner in which a person represents or expresses one's gender identity to others, often through clothing, hairstyles, voice, behavior, etc.
Transsexual	An older term for people whose gender identity is different from their assigned sex at birth who seeks to transition from male to female or female to male; this term has fallen out of favor for many, who consider it to sound overly clinical
Genderqueer	Describes individuals who identify as neither entirely male nor entirely female
Gender non-conforming	Individuals whose gender expression is different from societal expectations related to gender
Intersex	Refers to people who are born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy and/or chromosome pattern that does not seem to fit typical



	definitions of male or female
Queer	Refers to anyone who rejects strictly traditional understandings of sex and gender; umbrella term that includes aforementioned categories

Trans* youth are overlooked in most cultures because social structures adhere to the gender binary – “you’re born either male or female” – and encourage individuals not only to assume the gender of their biological sex, but also to adopt the various gender expectations and roles associated with it (Grossman, 2006). Those who express characteristics attributed to the other gender are typically stigmatized and seen as deviant. Inconsistencies in the presentation of one’s biological sex and gender expression are rarely tolerated by others (Gagne & Tewksbury, 1996). Because trans* individuals “violate conventional gender expectations,” they’re often targeted for discrimination and victimization, and ultimately experience more psychosocial and health problems than other social groups (Lombardi, 2001).

SUICIDALITY AMONG TRANS* YOUTH: AN EPIDEMIC

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among adolescents, making this a particularly high-risk age group. Even among adolescents, queer youth are especially at risk (see Cochran & Mays, 2000; Faulkner & Cranston, 1998). According to the 2006 study by Grossman and D’Augelli, LGB youth are 4 times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers. Nearly half of young trans* people, meanwhile, have seriously contemplated taking their lives, and around 25 percent report having made a suicide attempt.

RISK FACTORS

Risk factors for suicide include the “characteristics that make it more likely that a person will think about suicide or attempt suicide” (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2007). Though trans* youth are particularly vulnerable, just a handful of studies have sought to identify the factors that contribute to trans* youth suicide.

One of the reasons that queer students are more at risk for suicide than their heterosexual peers is that queer students experience a greater prevalence of suicide risk factors (Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006). Queer students exhibit higher levels of substance abuse and depression. They also face higher rates of parental and peer rejection and physical and verbal abuse (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2007). Harassment and bullying in schools has also been linked to suicide (Bontempo & D’Augelli, 2002).

Many of the studies that include trans* youth have been cross-sectional – meaning that they observe the population at one moment in time. In order to gain a better understanding of how various factors affect suicidality (and related behaviors, including self-harm), Liu and Mustanski (2012) conducted a longitudinal study, obtaining a community sample of 246 LGBT youth (aged 16-20) and following them prospectively over five time points at regular six-month intervals. At each check-in, Liu and Mustanski administered a battery of tests to determine participants’ suicidal ideation, self-harm, impulsivity, gender nonconformity, history of attempted suicide, hopelessness, social support, and LGBT victimization. The LGBT victimization measure included ten items and



was based on the work of D’Augelli and colleagues; it assessed the frequency over the most recent 6-month period of experiences of property damage and verbal and physical threats or assault “because you are, or were thought to be, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender” (Liu & Mustanski, 2012;).

Interestingly, LGBT victimization was one of the strongest predictors of suicidal ideation and self-harm. Having experienced LGBT victimization was associated with a 2.5-fold increased risk for self-harm. ‘History of attempted suicide’ was also a strong predictor. Similarly, gender nonconformity was another LGBT-specific risk factor with significant effects – indicating that trans* respondents were more likely to present with suicidal ideation or self-harm (Liu & Mustanski, 2012).

Other risk factors for suicide that researchers have identified for trans* individuals include reporting depression, having a history of substance abuse, being forced into sex, and feeling victimized/being discriminated against based on gender (Clements-Nolle, Marx, & Katz, 2006). Additionally, parental rejection, substance abuse, peer victimization, and family violence have been shown to contribute to suicidality among trans* youth (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2007).

Overall, however, two factors stand out as those most predictive of whether trans* kids will contemplate suicide: their experiences with family and their experiences in school (Grant et al., 2011).

SUICIDE PREVENTION METHODS

A review of the literature yields many recommendations for responding to the trans* youth suicide crisis. These recommendations include local and national initiatives in schools and communities, in addition to global solutions. Specifically, I propose two solutions for addressing this issue: on a local level, school- and community-based programs should provide education and support to trans* youth and their families and peers. And globally, international human rights law should broaden its scope to include protections for all sexual orientations, gender identities and forms of gender expression.

SCHOOL-BASED SOLUTIONS

Because their school experience is so crucial for the mental well-being of trans* youth, local solutions to decrease suicidality should include both K-12 and university-based initiatives.

A. K-12 Initiatives

Trans* and other queer students often experience harassment, bullying, and discrimination at school. A study by Kosciw (2004) found that 84 percent of queer youth experienced some form of harassment at school, and another study conducted in North Carolina schools indicated that 72 percent of respondents reported hearing homophobic remarks from other students (Phoenix, Hall, Weiss, Kemp, Wells, & Chan, 2006). Sometimes even school personnel exhibit negative attitudes toward queer students: the Phoenix et al. (2006) study found that 10 to 17 percent of students heard teachers or school staff make homophobic remarks in their presence. A nationally representative U.S. survey by Russell and Joyner (2001), as well as a handful of other nonrandom studies across the globe, has linked suicidal behavior in queer students to school-based harassment,



bullying, or violence because of sexual orientation or gender expression. The National Transgender Discrimination Survey found that 50 to 54 percent of respondents who were routinely harassed or bullied at school later attempted suicide (Grant et al., 2011).

Research shows that schools play a key role in creating a welcoming and safe environment for queer students, including trans* youth. When schools take an active role in decreasing school harassment, trans* youth report greater connectedness to school personnel, which increases feelings of school safety (Grant et al., 2011). Other studies show that having supportive school staff and bullying policies increase feelings of connectedness to the school, and self-esteem among queer youth (Grant et al., 2011). Thus, it is important that school faculty members are trained to respond appropriately to the issues facing trans* and other queer youth. Other recommendations include the integration of LGBT issues into the school curriculum, so that students begin learning about the queer spectrum from a young age. Queer youth also perceive their schools to be safer if they have a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) or similar organization.

B. University Initiatives

Although research indicates that more and more students are coming out as trans*, many colleges and universities have been slow to acknowledge the presence of trans people on their campuses. Consequently, trans* students often report feeling isolated and marginalized, rather than welcomed and included, at most institutions (Beemyn, 2005). Trans* issues and activism on college campuses are often lumped together with the LGB movement, meaning that individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and/or trans* are seen as part of one community, even though their individual identities and experiences can be vastly different.

In higher education, many faculty, staff, and students have minimal knowledge and understanding of trans* experiences and tend to engage in trans-exclusive practices (Beemyn, 2005). The areas of campus life that have proved to be particularly problematic for trans* students include housing, counseling, health care, bathrooms, locker rooms, documents and records, standardized forms, training, and programming (Beemyn, 2005; Schneider, 2010; McKinney, 2005).

Fortunately, many activists have begun the movement to secure trans* students' rights. In 1996, the University of Iowa became the first higher education institution to add "gender identity" to its non-discrimination policy, providing gender-variant students, faculty, and staff protection against discrimination while sending a message to the entire campus about the university's values by using trans-inclusive language (Beemyn, 2005). Many other universities have followed suit, adopting more inclusive language and working to protect trans* students.

However, there is still much work to be done. Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, and Frazer (2010) conducted the Campus Pride National Campus Climate Survey to explore queer students' experiences of campus climate at colleges and universities across the United States. Findings indicated that queer students continued to experience a "chilly," or hostile, campus climate, and trans* students reported higher rates of harassment than did men or women in the sample. Trans* students were also more likely than others to have had negative perceptions of campus climate, considered leaving their college, feared for their safety because of their gender identity, and



avoided disclosing their identity because they feared negative consequences and intimidation (Rankin et al., 2010).

Other studies indicate the extent to which trans* students experience violence and discrimination, and note the connections between these experiences and elevated levels of psychological distress (Effrig, Bieschke, & Locke, 2011). In their studies of trans* student victimization, Effrig et al. (2011) found that 25.7% of trans* students in their study reported a suicide attempt, compared to only 8.4% of students in a clinical sample of students who had accessed campus mental health services, and 4.9% of students in a nonclinical sample of students who had not accessed campus mental health services.

In order to tackle the issues facing trans* students head-on, colleges and universities must work to ensure that their facilities and services cater to the specific needs of this population. Most schools fail to meet the basic health-care needs of trans* students. The common standards of care, according to Beemyn (2005), require that a trans* student receive an initial psychological evaluation, followed by a period of therapy, before they are prescribed hormones (if they are even seeking hormone therapy). Since campus counseling staff typically lack training on trans* issues, they often cannot provide adequate support or assistance to gender-variant students in need of counseling; as a result, many trans* students are forced to see a non-campus therapist, often at their own expense. Because of the high rates of suicidal ideation and distress in this population, it is imperative that colleges and universities meet the mental health needs of trans* students (Beemyn, 2005).

In making campuses more accommodating to trans* students, colleges and universities should work to make facilities more inclusive. Because residence halls are often designed as single-sex by building and/or room, trans* students often have few safe, comfortable on-campus housing options. Gender-neutral housing could be a feasible option; indeed, gender-inclusive options have begun to spring up at universities around the country (Krum, Davis, & Galupo, 2013). Some schools have balked at the idea, though – a year-long campaign to establish a gender-neutral floor in a dormitory on UNC Chapel Hill's campus was ultimately struck down by the Board of Governors. For schools that have established gender-inclusive housing options, there is a better chance that trans* students will live in an environment in which they feel safer and more comfortable. And because Eisenberg and Resnick (2006) found 'perception of school safety' to be one of three factors that protected queer youth against suicide attempts, the importance of this truly cannot be overstated. Schools should also strive to make other facilities, including locker rooms, bathrooms, etc., more gender inclusive.

COMMUNITY-BASED SOLUTIONS

Though the vast majority of trans* kids face serious harassment at school, there is little respite from this sort of treatment at home, where conditions often are equally hostile. According to the NCTE report, 57% of trans* youth experience significant family rejection after coming out. Out of those kids, 26% end up homeless. Studies have found that queer youth who come from highly rejecting families are 8.4 times more likely to have attempted suicide as their peers who reported no or low



levels of family rejection (Grant et al., 2011). Community-based organizations must work to support families of trans* youth, so that those families can better support their trans* family member.

A. Best Fit Organization: North Carolina Transgender Unity (NCTU)

NC Transgender Unity (NCTU) is an example of a local organization that is doing exactly this kind of work. NCTU's advocacy branch uses outreach and policy work to make schools more inclusive of trans* youth. They recommend that schools take an active role in decreasing harassment against trans* kids by developing anti-bullying policies, training faculty members to respond appropriate to the issues facing trans* and other LGB youth, incorporating LGBT issues into the school curriculum, and establishing Gay-Straight Alliances or other LGBT-friendly student clubs.

At the university level, NCTU advocates for gender-neutral housing, bathrooms, and other facilities, and also encourages schools to provide counseling and healthcare options that meet the specific needs of trans* students. All these efforts serve to make trans* students feel safer and more welcomed by their peers.

To deal with the other big issue, family rejection, NCTU provides counseling for trans* youth and their family members, and offers numerous resources to help parents understand the challenges their trans* child faces, and how they can more effectively help them deal with those challenges (NC TG Unity).

These programs are highly effective. Having supportive parents cuts the suicide attempt rate for trans* kids nearly in half. The same is true for kids who feel safe and included at school (Grant et al., 2011). But although these local programs are effective, they are not enough.

GLOBAL SOLUTIONS

The elevated risk of suicide among trans* people does not stem from their inherent sex, sexuality, or gender identity – rather, it comes from the discrimination, exclusion, and lack of social support that trans* people often face in their daily lives (Grant et al., 2011). International human rights law must explicitly prohibit discrimination and harassment based on gender identity, sexual orientation, and other identity-related factors to ensure that the trans* community – and other marginalized groups – are protected from such practices.

A. The Beijing Platform for Action, CEDAW, and Women's Human Rights: An Overview

At the Fourth UN World Conference on Women in Beijing, China (September 1995), government delegates from 189 states convened to advance the goals of equality, development, and peace for all women everywhere and to ensure the full implementation of the human rights of women and girls (Kollman & Waites, 2009).



The Fourth World Conference on Women was a major human rights accomplishment for women. It represented the convergence of legal and political processes to underscore, on a global scale, the centrality of human rights to the struggle for equality. The Beijing +20 review provides an opportunity to recommit to the implementation of the Beijing Platform, with specific reference to women's human rights as stated in the CEDAW Convention and other international human rights treaties. Additionally, the CEDAW Convention provides a clear framework for ensuring the implementation of the Platform for years to come (Moser & Moser, 2005).

B. Sexual Rights

At the Beijing Conference, some governments tried to exclude sexual rights from the Platform for Action. Attempts to put the issue of LGBT rights on the UN agenda and define sexual orientation and gender identity and expression as UN matters have met firm resistance. The UN has been “unwilling or unable to recognize that LGBT rights are human rights, or fully to incorporate LGBT issues into its human rights work” (Moser & Moser, 2005). Indeed, the Beijing Platform refused to incorporate the words ‘sexual orientation’ in the final document (Coomaraswamy, 1997).

C. Recommendations

Trans* rights activists point to the need for legal recognition of the multiplicity of gender identity (Kollman & Waites, 2009). The focus on “women” in the Beijing Platform and CEDAW leaves trans* individuals in the position of questionable international law subjectivity. CEDAW's exclusion of multiple sexes has serious consequences: trans* individuals lack the social position ascribed to “men” in the sex binary and, furthermore, lack recourse to the rights promised to “women” by CEDAW. By adhering to the gender binary, these documents perpetuate the lack of formal recognition of trans* rights. Some activists argue that CEDAW should be trans-ed, meaning that it should no longer reflect a simple sex binary to the exclusion of other genders (Kollman & Waites, 2009).

Amending the Platform is simple: the language simply needs to be changed to include protections regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. It is important that we acknowledge the limitations of the current language used in the Platform to capture the fluidity of sexual and gender expression. By expanding the scope of the people protected by the Beijing Platform, we would help ensure the human rights of gender variant – and other queer – people along the gender identity spectrum, rather than only cisgender women who identify as such. We would also be making a commitment to rejecting a paradigm of women's rights that is based in outdated notions of biological determinism (Tahmindjis, 2005).

CONCLUSION

The elevated risk of suicide among trans* people does not stem from their inherent sex, sexuality, or gender identity – rather, it comes from the discrimination, exclusion, and lack of social support that trans* people often face in their daily lives (Grant et al., 2011).



Transphobia – the fear of and/or prejudice against people who are perceived to be trans* - is one example of the discrimination faced by trans* or gender-variant youth. Exposure to discrimination in the forms of cultural and social prejudice might manifest in the forms of family rejection, harassment, bullying, violence, or victimization – or in the form of institutional discrimination (e.g., those that result from laws and public policies that create inequities or omit trans* people from benefits and protections afforded to others). The experience of discrimination is associated with social isolation, negative sexual/gender identity, low self-esteem, and anxiety, depression, and other mental disorders. These negative outcomes, rather than trans* identity per se, appear to be key risk factors for suicidal ideation and behavior among trans* people (Grant et al., 2011).

Luckily, there are ways to protect trans* youth from suicide. Both school- and community-based initiatives have shown to be effective at making trans* youth feel safer and more included in their environments. These programs can promote the factors that predict resilience in trans* youth, including family acceptance, connection to caring others, a sense of safety, positive sexual/gender identity, and the availability of quality mental health treatments (Beemyn, 2005).

In addition to school and community interventions, trans* rights must be enshrined in national and international law. Nations must both reconceive of binary gender constraints and decouple gender identity with sexual orientation. While the gay rights movement has, in many nations, succeeded in a “public relations campaign to be seen as utterly average,” trans* people are still struggling to establish themselves as actual human beings in the eyes of many (Stern, 2014). Until that happens, many believe that the trans* suicide rate will only climb, and that discrimination against trans* people will continue to run rampant.

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