

Safety, Security and Well-Being of Trans Students in Canadian Public Schools

by

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## Abstract

This dissertation examines the safety, security, and well-being of trans students in Canadian schools, using data from the First and Second Canadian National School Climate Surveys. All students in Canada should have a safe and secure learning environment which supports their well-being. However, trans, nonbinary and/or gender nonconforming students ('trans students') are harassed and disrespected at school (Peter et al., 2021; Peter et al., 2017).<sup>1</sup> Comparing trans students' experiences to cisgender peers is typically challenging due to limited sample sizes. This dissertation (informed by feminist theory, intersectionality theory, and queer theory) fills an important gap in the literature by comparing trans students' safety, security and well-being at school to their cisgender peers (using ANCOVA and logistic regression). Further analyses examine whether racialized trans students' experiences differ on the same outcomes, and whether these outcomes have significantly changed in the roughly ten years between the First and Second School Climate Surveys. Results showed trans students have significantly lower safety, security and well-being than many of their peer groups (though racialized trans students do not differ) and no significant differences within the ten years between the First and Second Surveys. Trans students face an unwelcoming and even threatening school environment, and the lack of improvement in the last ten years suggests current interventions are not effectively promoting change.

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<sup>1</sup>In Canada, all provinces require children to attend school from age seven (7) to a minimum age of sixteen (16) (Brunswick, n.d.; Government of Canada, n.d.; Government of Manitoba, n.d.).

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## **Safety, Security and Well-Being of Trans Students in Canadian Public Schools**

In Canada, less than one percent of the population report their gender as trans, nonbinary and/or gender nonconforming (TNG)<sup>2</sup> on the national census (Statistics Canada, 2017c, 2020a, n.d.).<sup>3</sup> This small, widespread population is often treated poorly by society and struggle to have their rights and dignity respected (Veale et al., 2017a; Veale et al., 2016). Even in Canadian schools,<sup>4</sup> students who are trans, nonbinary and/or gender nonconforming report being harassed and disrespected by their peers (Peter et al., 2021; Peter et al., 2017). This dissertation examines to what degree their safety, security and well-being at school differs from their cisgender peers' experiences,<sup>5</sup> including those who are lesbian, gay or bisexual.<sup>6</sup>

While cisgender ('cis') peers<sup>7</sup> are treated respectfully, trans students are subjected to public scrutiny and opposition (Cossman & Katri, 2017; Day et al., 2020; Day et al., 2019) if they ask for their gender to be similarly acknowledged. Even in institutions they are required by law to attend (Campbell et al., 2022; Day et al., 2020; Day et al., 2019; Orue et al., 2021; Peter et al., 2021; Veale et al., 2017a; William, 2020) trans students are not safe and respected.

Across Canada, only about 0.24% of the population openly identify as trans, nonbinary and/or gender nonconforming (TNG) in the census (Statistics Canada, 2017c, 2020a, n.d.). This is

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<sup>2</sup>Referred to in this dissertation as "trans" for brevity. The reasons for this choice are further outlined in a subsequent section.

<sup>3</sup>Though this is likely an underestimation. Minoritized gender people might conceal their identity to avoid stigma (for example, see Gamarel et al., 2020; Gower et al., 2021; Ho & Mussap, 2020; Veale et al., 2017a), or for other reasons (e.g., not being out to the members of their household). However, estimates reported in other works are similarly small; for example, see Bosson et al. (2019), Risman et al. (2018)

<sup>4</sup>Where youth are required by law to attend. In Canada, all provinces require children to attend school from age seven (7) to a minimum age of sixteen (16) (Brunswick, n.d.; Government of Canada, n.d.; Government of Manitoba, n.d.).

<sup>5</sup>Cisgender refers to a person whose expected gender (based on sex assignment at birth) is consistent with their gender identity. For further discussion of this labeling and the issues engendered by it, see Darwin (2020)

<sup>6</sup>Or another sexual minority identity.

<sup>7</sup>Students whose assigned sex corresponds to the gender identity expected by society.

likely to underestimate true numbers. Gender identity and gender expression were only recently added to the Canadian Human Rights Act (Bill C-16, passed in 2017; Cossman & Katri, 2017) though various protections existed previously on a provincial basis (for example, Ontario passed protections in 2012; Airton et al., 2022). Anti-2SLGBTQIA+ groups often actively oppose offering specific supports within the school system to students of minoritized genders and sexualities (collectively described by variations on the initialism '2SLGBTQIA+') any specific supports within the school system.

For example, a student's right to have access to Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) and other LGBTQ organizations in Alberta schools. This was a hotly contested issue in 2019 (Ramsay, 2019) due to a proposed bill to revoke these rights and protections only 4 years after they had been established. Bill 8 ultimately passed, reversing previous protections allowing the establishment of GSAs in schools whenever students wanted them. Most importantly, the changes around Bill 8 allowed schools to notify parents if their child joined a GSA or similar organization (for further reading on this issue, see French, 2019).

Conservative politicians and faith-based groups consistently oppose supports for 2SLGBTQIA+ students (Johnson & Tremblay, 2018; Tremblay, 2019b, 2015) which can be particularly damaging to students who lack support in other areas (Allen et al., 2020; Andrzejewski et al., 2020; Needham & Austin, 2010). Research on this topic is essential for establishing the treatment 2SLGBTQIA+ students receive and asking their perspective on possible supports.

The landmark First National School Climate Survey on Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia in Canadian Schools (conducted by Drs. Catherine Taylor and Tracey Peter

between December 2007 and June 2009) found trans students received the most harassment out of all the groups surveyed (Taylor & Peter, 2011a). Trans students were also the targets of more harassment in general, including on identities unrelated to their gender (e.g., race).

Within Canadian schools, trans students navigate a complex social environment. Trans students have expressed that adults in their school environment share heteronormative views (Loutzenheiser, 2015), fail to support them in school spaces (Day et al., 2020), or discourage discussion of gender and sexuality (Taylor & Peter, 2011b) for example by changing the subject when a student asks them to respond to the use of a slur by a peer in class (Taylor & Peter, 2011a). Students can be forced to advocate for themselves on issues as basic as demanding safety and respect (Taylor et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2021; Taylor & Peter, 2011a). In the Second National School Climate Survey, trans students experienced the highest levels of all forms of harassment and victimization (Peter et al., 2021) compared to cisgender peers, including those who were LGBTQ+.

Previous movements to advance the rights of marginalized communities (e.g., LGB students) suggests positive changes in Canada's schools (and more broadly in society) will be implemented slowly (Brettschneider et al., 2017; Nick, 2018; Rayside, 2008). There have always been challenges in trying to address pervasive and chronic discrimination issues (Acker, 2006; McVeigh & Maria-Elena, 2009; Nash & Browne, 2021; van Den Berg, 2017). The most prominent finding of both the First and Second School Climate surveys was that there is no space free of harassment. Discrimination due to gender and/or sexuality is still in every class, in every Canadian school (Peter et al., 2021).

The School Climate Survey Reports provide the picture of what 2SLGBTQIA+ students experience in Canadian schools, a groundbreaking national view. This dissertation fills in the details that were not covered in the reports, by providing comparisons between specific gender groups. In many cases, due to the limitations presented by the small size of the trans population (Wernick et al., 2017), qualitative research is favored for research and provides rich, in-depth data (for example, see Casper et al., 2022; Pardo, 2019; Tan et al., 2022). Quantitative research with trans people is still unusual, with a few notable exceptions (e.g., the work of Taylor et al., 2020; and Veale et al., 2015), and is sorely needed to help show the scope of the issues that face trans people as a group. This dissertation fills a gap in research for trans people which few research works can, due to the use of nationally representative datasets that provided the sample size for comparative analyses.

These comparisons provide a perspective not just on the wellbeing and safety of Canadian trans students, but crucially, on whether their treatment is equal to their peers. This dissertation explores four research questions:

1. Do Canadian schools provide trans students with the same safety and support enjoyed by their cisgender peers? This will be examined by comparing the outcomes of each gender group on school connectedness, how safe they feel at school, and their ratings of emotional, social and psychological well-being.
2. If not, what factors contribute to better experiences and outcomes? This will be examined by comparing the mean scores on covariates wherever possible, and on contextual variables which provide insight into the student experiences on a daily basis such as participation in recreation, and representation in the school environment and curricula.

3. Which intersections of identity result in the best and worst outcomes? This will be examined by comparing the experiences of racialized and non-racialized gender minority students, as well as any other marginalized groups large enough to allow comparison.
4. Have trans students' experiences of safety and support in their school environment changed over time (specifically, between the First and Second National School Climate Surveys)? This will be examined by comparing the gender groups across the First and Second surveys on all the outcome variables available for comparison.

These questions were shaped by feminist theory, intersectionality theory, and queer theory (each discussed in-depth in a later chapter). These theoretical approaches also shape my approach to the literature review.

This dissertation is a rare opportunity to raise the voices of a sorely underrepresented group of youth in a country that is only beginning to protect their rights. Ordinarily, there are significant barriers to recruiting an adequate population of trans people for research. The unique advantage of this dissertation is the use of two large national datasets, which allows this dissertation to compare some matched variables across a ten-year timespan. Dr. Tracey Peter has provided access to data from the First and Second National School Climate Surveys of Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia in Canadian Schools. Both surveys contain a relatively large sample of trans students from a variety of schools across Canada. Because these datasets were collected several years apart, events which took place between them could have affected trans students' experiences: for example, the passing of Bill C-16. This allows this dissertation to examine whether the intervening years have resulted in significant differences in trans students' safety and support in school and explore possible reasons for differences.

## Positionality

Positionality is the stance (or 'position') from which a researcher views the social and political context of their study (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). In feminist research, positionality is accorded particular importance because of the markedly imbalanced gender positionality within academia (Brickell, 2006) which favors men's perspectives. While gender was an early and well-supported focus of feminist theory on positionality, there is increasing attention to the other identities (e.g., Whiteness, affluence) which can dominate research (Lykke, 2010) and limit challenges to dominant power structures.

A significant proportion of formative academic works in many fields (including sociology) are written from an androcentric point of view, where men's perspectives are treated as neutral works representative of the human experience (Code, 2002). Feminist, queer, anti-racist and disability approaches to research have intentionally worked to problematize the issue of majority identities being centred in research and much of the contributing body of researchers (by design) for a great length of time. For examples relevant to the subject of this dissertation, see Butler (1990); Calliste et al. (1995); Camfield (2017); Carbado and Harris (2019); de Beauvoir (1953); Margolin (2015); McRuer and Wilkerson (2003); Meyer (2015); Miller (2018); Rodriguez-Roldan (2020); Sherry (2010); Snorton (2017).

The same 'politics of identity' (Crenshaw, 1991) which affect researched populations also affect researchers, and the outcomes of their work (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). Below I detail my positionality relative to this dissertation, with particular attention to where I share similar identities to those of the students in the dataset.

As a nonbinary bisexual researcher, my work on this topic is informed by my experiences in the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and a long history of 2SLGBTQIA+ advocacy (such as volunteering, serving on the board of the Northern Pride Centre Society, planning 2SLGBTQIA+ community events, and co-founding a nonprofit to support trans youth in Northern BC). My perspective differs markedly from the trans students who are attending high school at the time of the First and Second School Climate Surveys. I do not share the identities of many of those who report the most severe or frequent discrimination (Arayasirikul & Wilson, 2019; Jefferson et al., 2013; Marcellin et al., 2013) such as racialized trans girls and transfemmes.

I am a white able-bodied legal adult with several post-secondary degrees. I hold power in this dissertation and in my own life in a way the researched population does not. This is important to acknowledge because having an 'insider' identity (in this case, my 2SLGBTQIA+ identities) can lead researchers erroneously to see themselves as on equal footing with the contributors (Parson, 2019). I have worked to remain conscious of these differences while writing this dissertation.

Being a nonbinary bisexual person still brings an advantage to my proposed dissertation work. I share an experience with trans students of existing in a world designed for binary identities. I have been the target of discrimination based on my gender and sexual identities, and conflation between the two. I perceive and interpret the results of this type of research differently than a cisgender researcher would, as someone whose identity inherently challenges the preconceptions of binary gender that permeate Canadian society. There are few trans researchers, and this perspective is an uncommon advantage.

I hope to be a facilitator of the voices and needs of trans youth. My role is to use my skills to present and contextualize the information they have contributed. Wherever possible I have presented sufficient information that allows the readers to draw their own conclusions as well as providing my own conclusions.

### **Outline**

I begin this dissertation with the theoretical framework which has shaped the project, the literature review, the method and measurement used in the National School Climate Surveys, analysis and results, and finally the discussion of results organized by each research question. This dissertation is a theoretically informed quantitative work:<sup>8</sup> a quantitative work shaped and grounded by explicit discussion of theory.<sup>9</sup>

The literature review covers academic work on gender (in particular, gender diversity), trans students in Canada, and how intersecting marginalized identities might shape their experiences. I outline in brief the history and context of the comparison groups used in the analysis. Additional space is given to the context faced by Indigenous, Black, and Asian youth in Canada when the Second School Climate Survey took place. Numbers were not sufficient to allow anything other than a broad comparison, but this context is retained to encourage separate consideration of these groups in future works.

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<sup>8</sup>Thank you to Dr. Deborah McPhail for naming this approach.

<sup>9</sup>Quantitative works are typically constructed and reported without explicit reference to theory (Eagly & Riger, 2014) though in practice they are using positivist theory without naming it as such (Golafshani, 2003; McCall, 2005). All research employs theory (whether or not it is identified as theory) because every researcher must have an idea of what information they would like to gather, the form it is in, and where it can be found (Hesse-Biber, 2012c). Research (typically positivist; for example, see Braun et al., 2014) which does not include explicitly outlined theory is simply theoretically opaque.

This is followed by a discussion of the terms and language used in this dissertation (particularly language referring to groups within the 2SLGBTQIA+ community) and a brief critique of the research on trans, nonbinary and/or gender nonconforming (TNG) students, including the gaps in the literature addressed by the current research. The literature review also covers the identities measured in the School Climate Surveys, with reference to how these other aspects of identity can further shape the experiences of trans students.

The theoretical framework of this dissertation is formed from feminist theory, intersectional theory, and queer theory. In the theory chapter, each is defined and discussed in turn in reference to gender as well as in the ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies of the proposed research. Each of these theories also influences the analysis and proposed dissemination of results.

The method and measurement chapter provides an overview of the recruitment methods and tools used in the National School Climate surveys, followed by a detailed discussion of each sample. This chapter concludes with a detailed discussion of the research questions and the variables used to examine them, including the specific measures used for each variable and rationale for including it in the research. This is followed by chapters which relate the broad outcomes and measures of central tendency for the first dataset, and then chapters of analysis for each research question respectively. The final chapters discuss the results, their limitations, and the steps that might be taken to improve the school experiences of transgender, nonbinary, Two Spirit and other gender diverse youth in Canada.

### Gender and Language in this Dissertation

Genders beyond the simplistic cisgender binary of 'men' and 'women' are often grouped under the umbrella term 'trans' or 'transgender' (Thorne et al., 2019). However, this term does not accurately describe all trans, nonbinary and/or gender nonconforming (TNG) people. Though useful for brevity and to be consistent with the terms in common use, it should not be used without reflection on its' origins and relatively limited descriptive quality.

The prefix 'trans' ('across') denotes a shift across identity categories (Bosson et al., 2019). Using the term 'transgender' to describe a person includes the implication that they are required to 'cross' social, legal and/or medical categories ("transition") to 'become' their gender (Tam & Hines, 2010). People who do not recognize the legitimacy of assigned sex at birth and the gender identity presumed to correspond to that assignment may not consider themselves to be crossing any categories ("transitioning") when they live openly. Using 'trans' unreflectively to refer to diverse genders can contribute to naturalizing binary gender, by positioning elements of the binary an important part of other genders' experiences.<sup>10</sup>

Not all trans, nonbinary and/or gender nonconforming (TNG) people necessarily identify themselves using trans and/or transgender (for example, see Darwin, 2020; Kuper et al., 2012; Rushton et al., 2019). The term 'trans' is still more commonly associated with binary trans identities<sup>11</sup> than the broader community of trans, nonbinary and/or gender nonconforming (TNG) people. Binary identities, even when trans, still evoke the familiar and more palatable idea of gender as binary, rather than the more challenging reality of a multiplicity of social and

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<sup>10</sup>For example, compulsory assignment to a binary gender at birth, viewing adjustments made to affirm your gender as a transition 'to' and 'from' existing categories of gender (particularly in the case of binary trans people).

<sup>11</sup>Transgender women and transgender men.

interrelation genders. It is simply a fact that gender is not binary<sup>12</sup> and a diverse range of genders can be found in the world (Allen et al., 2020; Lefevor et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2020; Veale et al., 2015) including within Canada (Statistics Canada, 2022b).<sup>13</sup> Using 'trans' as a broad term can erase nonbinary people (Allen et al., 2020; Casper et al., 2022; Darwin, 2020). Others such as Two Spirit people<sup>14</sup> may understandably oppose being grouped with genders derived from settler-colonial systems of categorization and referred to by their terms.

Within Canada, Two Spirit people have been persecuted and intentionally erased from mainstream (colonizer) culture (Boellstorff et al., 2014; Cameron, 2005). Use of 'trans' may also hold particular significance for people of trans, nonbinary and/or gender nonconforming (TNG) identities whose cultures have been impacted by colonization (Kanemasu & Liki, 2020), where European practices such as binary gender roles were forcibly imposed on other nations through invasion and colonization (Upadhyay, 2021; Woltmann, 2020). Cis binary ideology does not govern gender<sup>15</sup> in the Indigenous cultures of Turtle Island ('North America') such as those called Canada (Taylor & Peter, 2011a), the United States (Bosson et al., 2019), and México (Mirandé, 2014), as well as in India (Woltmann, 2020), Thailand (Jackson & Sullivan, 1999), Samoa (Schmidt, 2010), Indonesia (Bexley et al., 2023), Hawai'i (Robertson, 1989) and Albania (Littlewood, 2002; Tarifa, 2007).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Regardless of individual beliefs, this is what has been documented worldwide.

<sup>13</sup>Where Statistics Canada now defines gender as "...the gender that a person internally feels ('gender identity' along the gender spectrum) and/or the gender a person publicly expresses ('gender expression') in their daily life..." (Statistics Canada, 2019, p. 1).

<sup>14</sup>An Indigenous cultural identity encompassing aspects of what settler-colonial society calls gender and sexual diversity (Cameron, 2005; Morrison et al., 2019; Robinson, 2020).

<sup>15</sup>As an identity and/or social and cultural role.

<sup>16</sup>Gender is also often intimately connected to other concepts such as sexuality and family in cultures such as those indigenous to Turtle Island ('North America') (Cameron, 2005; Morrison et al., 2019; Robinson, 2020).

Language can be a battleground for people of various genders. It matters enormously why and how the language used for people of diverse genders is chosen because language has so often been used to erase, belittle and dismiss, while cementing a cis hegemony through discursive practice (Moon & Holling, 2020; Morrison et al., 2019; Rands, 2009; Rushton et al., 2019; Thorne et al., 2019). The reasons for primarily using the term 'trans'<sup>17</sup> in this dissertation are as follows. Gender terms grow every year (for an overview of how quickly terms multiply to claim (gender) identity, see Thorne et al., 2019). Using a term ('trans') which relies on gender binary categorization can be practical for an etymological heritage which fits many in the community, as well as (2) brevity, (3) clarity, and (4) familiarity.

In the cis-centric society trans, nonbinary and/or gender nonconforming (TNG) people navigate, the term 'trans' descriptively fits the experience of many people who are forced to shift the assumptions of gender attached to their assigned sex, in order to live openly as their gender (Rands, 2009). 'Trans' also lends itself more easily to clear writing than more cumbersome but specific terms (e.g., 'minoritized genders,' 'marginalized genders,' 'the gender diverse community'). Terms which require full phrases at each use or can be awkward to attach descriptively to groups under study have advantages in that they may be technically more accurate, and force readers to confront the complexity of gender diversity. There is a precedent for this in writing about gender specifically. Judith Butler has pointed out in reference to *Gender Trouble* that the need to break from conformity needed to talk about subjects outside the rules might need to confront being difficult to read as "neither grammar nor style is politically neutral" (xvii, Butler, 1990).

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<sup>17</sup>Or where more appropriate, 'transgender.'

My initial instinct as an author was to force the reader to confront this challenge to intelligibility, to reinforce the situation of the trans/gender community existing outside the status quo as an intentional minority (e.g., "minoritized genders" as an active phrase). Gender diverse people or the community by any other term are a group in part constructed by others as both a minority and outside the norm, through a society intent on creating the illusion of a cisgender binary. However, readability prevailed to allow this dissertation to be useful to as many people as possible.

Activists, community organizers, educators, allies, and accomplices<sup>18</sup> can be found across numerous disciplines and this dissertation should be useful to as many as possible. Simplicity is key when writing legibly for people of different backgrounds (Falkenberg & Tubb, 2017). Articulating all the genders within the trans, nonbinary and/or gender nonconforming (TNG) community is not practical throughout a dissertation which repeatedly references that community. It is also a familiar term in work on gender (Thorne et al., 2019), which is easier to read and integrate with other text. A specific but perhaps bulky or awkward expression has disadvantages when used frequently. This use could fatigue a reader by creating lengthier sentences or obfuscate the intended meaning of the writing, reducing impact (Schostak & Schostak, 2013). Clarity can also be an issue if using unusual verbiage requires an unusual sentence structure, or if the expression itself evokes technical knowledge (Bristol, n.d.; Falkenberg & Tubb, 2017; Tsingos, 1998). This might intimidate a lay reader (Kerwer et al.,

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<sup>18</sup>An alternative expression to "ally" originating in anti-racist organizing (Powell & Kelly, 2017), which evokes a more active role in aiding and abetting disruptions of the ruling classes and identity groups (American Civil Liberties Union of Kansas, 2023; Cumming-Potvin, 2023; Jackson, 2019). See DEI educator Willie Jackson's essay terms (Jackson, 2019) for a brief overview in lay terms, and the Kansas ACLU primer for an extension into 2SLGBTQIA+ activist spaces (American Civil Liberties Union of Kansas, 2023).

2021), be unfamiliar to a reader from a different discipline, or be confusing to a reader with a cross-cultural perspective and/or English as an additional language (Squires et al., 2025). Like any phrase referring to a group of marginalized people, it must be used with reflection and criticism.

The benefits of using 'trans' in this dissertation are also compatibility with terminology in existing works. 'Trans' will be more easily found as a search term than less commonly used expressions and will be understood by readers who lack expertise in gender terms. Using 'trans'<sup>19</sup> will help this dissertation to be more accessible to those from diverse backgrounds who could make use of it. Through this reasoning, 'trans' is used with caution within this dissertation, and is intended to explicitly refer to all the various genders outside of binary cisgender identities. Discussion and analysis in this dissertation articulate the genders included where possible and use more specific language wherever appropriate.

### **Issues with Majority/Minority Wording**

Using terms such as 'cisgender' and 'trans' implicitly evokes the idea of minorities and majorities, without highlighting the active role society plays in constructing minorities and majorities. Accepted neoliberal discourses around marginalized groups typically refer to various groups uncritically as 'minorities' (Petchesky, 2008) and construct them as 'other,' to be treated with tolerance and condescension (Brown, 2006). Conceptualizing everyone outside of cisgender as one group ('trans/transgender,' or a 'minority') can contribute to the issue of normalizing cisgender identities and separating them from the rest of genders as a group (Petchesky, 2008). There is greater diversity and variety in the human populations than

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<sup>19</sup>Or where needed, 'transgender.'

dichotomous terms suggest. The use of binary terms (even with caveats) must be consistently challenged to prevent them being viewed as objective, stable and discrete categories.<sup>20</sup>

Dividing the world into minorities and majorities can encourage the idea of minority/majority categories as distinct, stable and exclusive (Petchesky, 2008; Sullivan, 2003). Categories viewed pragmatically are simplistic, artificial terms used to categorize a complex population (humans) with a fluid and unfixed nature (Butler, 1990; Lorber, 1996). Cisnormative binary narratives benefit from seeing other groups as separate and distinct from their "normal" identities (Bauer et al., 2009). Making gender terms and their limitations explicit in the discussion above is intended to mitigate the prospective harms of this practice.<sup>21</sup>

### **Language**

The goals of language in this dissertation are accuracy, practicality, respect, and openness. Wherever possible, categories are loosely grouped, and definitions kept relatively open. This is in deference to the variety of people and cultures who make up what is often called the 2SLGBTQIA+ community or some variation therein. This language also prioritizes accuracy, because a more specific and structured definition might misrepresent or exclude some members of a group. Because it is impossible to include representation of all possible genders and sexualities in the initialism 2SLGBTQIA+,<sup>22</sup> it is used sparingly.

Trans, nonbinary and/or gender nonconforming (TNG) is used in this dissertation to refer to anyone who is not cisgender with the understanding that this is a complex and nuanced

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<sup>20</sup>Rather than subjective, contextual, and evolving terms.

<sup>21</sup>This discussion is also included to remind researchers and readers that minority and majority categories are actively created and promoted by social discourse.

<sup>22</sup>For example, terms such as pangender, demi-girl/demiboy, pansexual, androsexual and sapphic are not represented.

group. 'Trans' is used as an abbreviation for this expression. This broad term reflects an effort to succinctly capture the collective group of diverse genders, as minoritized by society.<sup>23</sup> For consistency, anyone who is not heterosexual is referred to with LGBTQ+. 'LGBTQ+' in this dissertation refers to anyone who does not identify as heterosexual; including but not limited to lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, queer, asexual, and Two Spirit<sup>24</sup> people. Where appropriate, the expression 'openly 2SLGBTQIA+' (or openly trans, etc.) is used to denote people who have indicated that others know of their 2SLGBTQIA+ identity.<sup>25</sup>

The word 'contributions' is intentionally used throughout to refer to the answers and comments given by the youth who completed the survey. This dissertation actively avoids using the passive term 'participants.' Referring to people involved in research as 'participants' is part of a language tradition which conveys authority on the researcher and could reinforce established power dynamics. People referred to as participants can be relegated to relative anonymity as part of a large group who have dutifully completed a given task (e.g., see use in Jupp, 2006) and are rarely accorded an active role in shaping research.

The people who contributed to the survey are referred to descriptively as students (or as 'students who contributed') partly as a reminder of the context that this data is drawn from a school-based survey. On occasion, the students are also referred to as youth or minors. The recognizably subordinate word 'minors' is used as a reminder of their legal marginalization

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<sup>23</sup>Which cannot be exhaustive in consistent and efficient use in this dissertation and thus would risk validating some identities while unintentionally excluding others. In addition, some identities are reported by so few students that identifying their group might compromise their anonymity.

<sup>24</sup>Where it is intended to represent the cultural term which is used for minority gender and/or sexual identity which may be reported by Indigenous students, who may also use other identifiers (Robinson, 2020).

<sup>25</sup>Without ignoring the fact that some may choose to keep their identity private for reasons of their own (and as a result, would not face reactions to their identity in the school environment) or may actively conceal their identity for safety, to avoid stigma, or other reasons.

based on age, which denies youth the authority to make certain changes in their environment or activities.

The students who contributed the data are approached as the authorities of their own experiences, recognized as contributors to shared epistemologies, and given due respect for their willingness to share information and their time contributed to the data which has made this work and others possible. Their responses are further framed by the body of literature on trans communities and their experiences, an area of research which is still rapidly expanding.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Research specifically on trans, nonbinary and/or gender nonconforming (TNG) people is still relatively limited (Allen et al., 2020; Holloway, 2023; Taylor et al., 2020). Existing research has more commonly focused on binary identities (for example, transgender men and women) rather than the numerous other identities (for example, genderqueer, agender, genderflux, genderfluid, transfeminine, transmasculine, bigender, androgene-androgenous, etc; Lefevor et al., 2019; Veale et al., 2015).<sup>26</sup> This reflects the slower social acceptance of gender diversity and continued binary bias within constructions of gender.<sup>27</sup>

Comprehensive research on the treatment of trans, nonbinary and/or gender nonconforming (TNG) people is long overdue. Research on trans people is relatively limited (Miller, 2018). Most 2SLGBTQIA+ research group gender and sexuality groups together, potentially overlooking overlap between the two groups or differences in attitudes and treatment directed at them (Worthen, 2013).

Studies which do differentiate between gender and sexualities typically examine two other measures of identity at most (e.g., Paisley & Tayar, 2016; Robinson, 2017; White & Jenkins, 2017) for practical reasons. Trans people are a small group even before subdivision by other identities. Sample sizes in quantitative work rarely allow for an intersectional analysis and examination of the axes of identity where trans people are most targeted for discrimination.

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<sup>26</sup>Notably, some researchers hold viewpoints on the growing body of work on diverse genders, for example within Indigenous communities; see works from Paechter et al. (2021); Wilson et al. (2019). Other researchers such as Peter et al. (2021); Taylor et al. (2020); and Taylor et al. (2021) have significantly expanded their options for participants to report their gender identity, capturing a wider range of options.

<sup>27</sup>Even in research focused on trans people, privilege is accorded to those closest to the binary system which colonizers have worked into the social fabric of Canada (Upadhyay, 2021).

In many cases, research on gender is forced to use definitions for gender groups which are restrictive and/or are inconsistent with how populations identify their gender<sup>28</sup> due to the obligations of protecting privacy and anonymity, or to allow collective groups large enough for comparison. The next section shows outlines how Statistics Canada performs data collection and categorization of trans people, an example of how specific and accurate data about trans Canadians' identities is currently not available on a national level.

### **Statistics Canada and Definitions of Gender**

In the 2021 Statistics Canada Population Census, there was still only one category corresponding to trans people (Statistics Canada, 2019, 2020c). Categorization in this group was determined by two questions which asked about sex assigned at birth and current gender. If the gender option chosen<sup>29</sup> did not “match” the sex assigned at birth,<sup>30</sup> then the respondent was categorized as transgender (and referred to as transgender in reporting).

The instructions of the StatsCan questionnaire do not explicitly allow or disallow multiple options.<sup>31</sup> However, Statistics Canada gender definitions indicate that anyone who is not cisgender<sup>32</sup> would be categorized as transgender (Statistics Canada, 2021). The latter would by this standard include respondents who chose multiple gender responses if allowed.

The current Statistics Canada definitions for sex and gender continue to present issues for the complete and accurate measure of the population. For example, the erasure of intersex

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<sup>28</sup>Which contributes to inaccurate reporting and erasure.

<sup>29</sup>The options provided were ‘male’, ‘female’, and ‘please specify’ (See Statistics Canada, 2017a; Statistics Canada, 2017c for data collection and use for this question; Statistics Canada, 2022b).

<sup>30</sup>E.g., correspond to the socially imposed gender expectation for that sex assignment; being ‘cisgender.’

<sup>31</sup>E.g., both ‘male’ and ‘female’ gender options without making use of the ‘please specify’ response.

<sup>32</sup>“Persons who have reported that their sex assigned at birth is the same as their current gender” (Statistics Canada, 2021).

people (as ‘male’ and ‘female’ are the only sex options) and the inherent conflation of sex and gender within the definition of cisgender<sup>33</sup>. Yet the inclusion of separate sex and gender categories and acknowledgement of trans people still represents a small step forward from previous years’ measures<sup>34</sup> and may represent a trend toward future changes which further illuminate the demographics of the population.

In 2018, approximately 75,000 (0.24%) Canadians 15 and older reported a transgender identity (Statistics Canada, 2020b)<sup>35</sup>. As of 2021, this increased to 100,815 (0.33%) with options that allowed the identification of different identity groups (Statistics Canada, 2022c). Most (41.02%) were nonbinary, followed by transgender women (31.30%) and transgender men (27.68%; Statistics Canada, 2022c).<sup>36</sup>

This estimate is likely low for several reasons. For example, the relatively limited response categories, or a desire to avoid stigma. In addition, Canadians younger than 18 who have a trans identity may want this acknowledged in the survey but be overruled if the adult completing the survey is unsupportive<sup>37</sup>. Or alternatively, their identity may not be reported in the census because the person completing the survey for their household is unaware of their identity.

At present, the Statistics Canada percentage of trans Canadians may not be wholly accurate but provides a rough estimate of trans Canadians. The National School Climate Surveys

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<sup>33</sup>“Persons who have reported that their sex assigned at birth is the same as their current gender” (Statistics Canada, 2021).

<sup>34</sup>Up until 2016, the only questions asked about sex: options ‘male’ and ‘female’ (Statistics Canada, 2020c).

<sup>35</sup>With no distinction between binary and nonbinary identities (Statistics Canada, 2020b).

<sup>36</sup>Any identity that was not cisgender, including non-binary identities.

<sup>37</sup>Statistics Canada requires an adult member of the household to respond on behalf of the household (Statistics Canada, 2022a).

offer a more detailed record of trans people under 18, as students were able to make their own choice about whether to report their trans identity, and able to select the term that best described them from a more comprehensive list. The National School Climate Surveys also offered space for their own words of definition or feedback.

In contrast, roughly one million (4%) Canadians of the same age group indicated they were LGBTQ+ (Statistics Canada, 2020b). Even at around eight times the size of the trans population, research on LGBTQ+ people as a specific group can still face barriers due to the widespread and diverse nature of the community. Understandably, most 2SLGBTQIA+ research produces results entirely or primarily focused on LGBTQ+ people, or merges the two groups, simply to allow for their data to be examined. However, combining these groups can obscure the different experiences of trans people and LGBTQ+ people.

### **Meeting the Needs of Trans People in Canada**

Increasing numbers of people openly identify themselves as part of the trans community (Nolan et al., 2019). Social, medical, and educational services within Canada may not be prepared to ensure they receive equal treatment and access.

Several educators and stakeholders in Canada have acted on the results of the First School Climate Survey (Peter et al., 2021; Taylor & Peter, 2011a) to create protections aimed at correcting the negative experiences 2SLGBTQIA+ students reported in the First Survey. This dissertation aims to be a similar resource and facilitate the creation of new supports for trans students specifically.

Findings like those of the first National School Survey show definitively different treatment of the two groups (trans students and LGBTQ students) with trans students bearing

greater harassment and stress (Taylor & Peter, 2011a). Trans people are often left out of the advances made by 2SLGBTQIA+ rights movements (Gentile et al., 2017), a community which ostensibly includes them. For example, the 1971 document titled 'We Demand' originated from a group of LGBTQ activists and outlined demands for equality in Canada, but the demands were specifically for the rights of LGBQ people (Levy, 2020). This omission was critically examined in a later, similar list of demands (Gentile et al., 2017).

Despite profound contributions to 'LGBT' equality movements (for example, see Gentile et al., 2017; Goldberg & Beemyn, 2021; Ryan, 2020) trans rights have lagged behind LGBQ+ identity rights despite ostensibly being part of a united movement ('LGBT' rights, '2SLGBTQIA' rights, etc.). In Canada, Bill C-16 protecting gender identity and expression from discrimination was passed in 2017 (Cossman & Katri, 2017) while similar protections for LGBQ+ people were created more than thirty years earlier (Rau, 2014)<sup>38</sup>. Notably, this did not include equal access to marriage, which would not pass until 2005 in Canada.

Due to the inconsistent treatment and overall neglect of the trans community in Canadian society, this dissertation will be a significant contribution to research on the experiences of trans students and a rare chance to explore the axes of identity targeted most harshly for ill-treatment.

### **Trans Youth in Canadian Schools**

Trans students report a higher likelihood of physical assault, critique and social ostracism than their peers; they also report feeling more depressed (Grossman et al., 2021;

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<sup>38</sup>In 1995 when sexual orientation was ruled protected from discrimination under Section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Rau, 2014).

Hunt et al., 2020; Lefevor et al., 2019; Pollitt et al., 2021; Wittlin et al., 2025). Unsurprisingly, these students also lack feelings of connection to the schools where they spend so much of their time. Educators are broadly aware of the issues facing 2SLGBTQIA+ students; the vast majority (88%) agree “LGBTQ people still need to work for inclusion in schools” (Taylor et al., 2015, p. 15).

Canadian schools have significant work ahead before they can offer 2SLGBTQIA+ students the safe and supportive environment that their cisgender heterosexual peers enjoy. Current supports offered to 2SLGBTQIA+ students (e.g., Pride Centres) focus only on sexuality and/or gender. These supports are not designed to address ways other marginalized identities (e.g., race) shape discrimination directed at trans students (Shields, 2008). The lack of support at school is compounded by the fact that trans students may lack parental support (Factor & Rothblum, 2008). The absence of support in both school and home environments could cause trans students to become particularly isolated.

Encouragingly, schools where transphobia<sup>39</sup> has been specifically addressed are more likely to have other forms of visibility and support for 2SLGBTQIA+ students (Taylor et al., 2015). One possible explanation is that addressing incidents of transphobia requires at least a basic understanding of trans issues and by extension, concepts like sexuality which are predicated on gender. Another possibility is that trans people have had a more prominent role in activism and events in the 2SLGBTQIA+ community in recent years (Davy & Cordoba, 2020). This may

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<sup>39</sup>A common umbrella term for the harassment of minoritized genders; for a detailed discussion of harassment terms and measures see Nadal (2018).

encourage more robust and visible supports for trans people specifically, in spaces where these activities are present.

### **On the Importance of Race**

Race is central to discrimination in Canada and other countries built on colonization (for example, see Calliste et al., 1995; Camfield, 2017; Lee & Trifonas, 2020; Lugones, 2020; Mohanty, 2003; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012) openly documented in the legal history of Canada as a pretext for denial of rights. Race is also a common focus of intersectionality<sup>40</sup> theory, in part because it is often visible while other marginalized identities (for example, LGBTQ+ identity) could potentially be concealed. Race is further examined in the intersectionality theory section.

Schools are spaces where racialized knowledge and identity is often ignored or dismissed (e.g., Braun et al., 2014) while students are undergoing a complex process of self-identity. This has been identified within education research as a particular problem for racialized students as far back as 1990 when Warren Crichlow examined school as a microcosm of the social inequalities, which functions to naturalize and reinscribe these unequal power dynamics during the time that people discover who they are (Crichlow et al., 1990).

This article is notable for its synthesis of the monocultural epistemological teachings of Turtle Island ('North America') and the formation of identity; it is also a valuable example of the resistance to change. The article was published more than thirty years ago, and the issues it outlines are contemporary for the purposes of this doctoral work.

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<sup>40</sup>The consideration of how intersecting axes of identity affect each other to result in unique discrimination (Crenshaw, 1991).

At present, researchers have a unique opportunity to examine the effect of polarizing social and political events which explicitly centre on specific racial groups. Within Canada, Indigenous, Black and Asian populations have all faced specific discrimination (e.g., Liu, 2021; Tafarodi, 2014; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2012, 2016; Walker, 1985; Ware et al., 2020; Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2022) while their right to live free of violence have been the subject of political debate.

For Indigenous youth, the discrimination highlighted by various incidences of overt racism such as the denial of treaty fishing rights (APTN National News, 2020) is nothing new. It is only the most recent blow in an ongoing colonization of their land and destruction of their population and culture (Campbell et al., 2024; Dickason et al., 2023; Gilmore, 2021; Kino-nda-niimi Collective, 2014; Kizuk, 2020; Sunga, 2017).

For Black youth, the Black Lives Matter movement prompted by highly visible deaths at the hands of various law enforcement agencies (e.g., Ellis et al., 2018) which has cast more light on the contemporary and historical anti-Black discrimination in Canada (CTVNews.ca, 2020; Do et al., 2020; Maynard, 2017; Reynolds, 2016; Walker, 1985; Ware et al., 2020; Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2022). A global spotlight has been focused on Black Lives Matter and the North American responses to the movement (Taylor, 2020; Ware et al., 2020), saturating traditional and social media.

Finally, Asian youth<sup>41</sup> faced a sharp increase in hate crimes and ostracism with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The perceived connection of the virus to the Asian community (Liu,

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<sup>41</sup>Recent hate crimes have specifically targeted people of Chinese ethnicity but have also harmed people of other Asian identities. These people may be perceived as Chinese or are similar enough in the mind of the aggressor to make them targets of anti-Chinese sentiments (Liu, 2021).

2021) has been inflated by American political figures (United Nations, 2020) and used as a focus for racist ire.

Racism is not uncommon in Canada (Campbell et al., 2024; Douglas, 2020; Tafarodi, 2014; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2016; Walker, 1985; Ware et al., 2020; Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2022).<sup>42</sup> Being part of a racialized community could exacerbate discrimination directed trans students. The 2SLGBTQIA+ community in North America has often centred around the experiences of white people (Logie & Rwigema, 2014). It is especially important for this dissertation (and other 2SLGBTQIA+ works) to pay particular attention to the neglected racialized members of the community.

### **Marginalized Identities and Trans Identity**

Marginalized identities measured in the National School Climate Survey include race and sexuality. These identities likely affect the experience of gender in some way. Gender is increasingly measured and described with more diverse terms (Thorne et al., 2019). However, research in which marginalized identities other than 2SLGBTQIA+ identity are the primary focus commonly use binary measures (for example, these works on marginalized racial groups cited in previous sections, all of which use only binary conceptions of gender; Bablak et al., 2016; Houshmand et al., 2014; Kizuk, 2020; Poolokasingham et al., 2014; Sunga, 2017; Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2022). This can limit how useful such works are in understanding the experiences of trans people who share those identities.

Below, each identity measured in the School Climate Surveys is examined in the context of discrimination, youth, and education. Though there may not be enough overlap between

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<sup>42</sup>For example, see Henry (2002); Kino-nda-niimi Collective (2014); Larochette et al. (2010).

trans students and all these axes of identity to be effectively analyzed, in later sections this dissertation examines and reports characteristics of different groups wherever they do not meet the criteria of specific tests.

### **The Relationship of Race to Discrimination, Youth, and Education**

A vision of Canada as “raceless” and happily diverse dominates the collective Canadian imagination (Price, 2013), part of a self-told story which distances Canada from the more visible racialized violence in the United States of America. This national self-image is clearly intentional, buoyed in some ways by determined ignorance.<sup>43</sup>

Black and Indigenous people are overrepresented in Canadian police fatalities (Flanagan, 2020), particularly men (Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2022). Despite this fact, the response to the Black Lives Matter movement in Canada focused primarily on American victims of violence (e.g., CTVNews.ca, 2020). George Floyd is arguably a better-known name in Canada than Abdirahman Abdi, despite witnesses reporting Abdi's death at the hands of Canadian law enforcement as equally horrific (Cole, 2016). As amply illustrated by the racialized violence rife within the history of the country,<sup>44</sup> Canada has a serious problem with racial injustice.

Despite receiving less overt media attention within Canada than other close neighbours (such as the United States) race is a significant factor in the experiences and outcomes of young Canadians navigating their school years (Larochette et al., 2010). Whether it is Black Canadian teenagers being racially harassed by police on their way to and from school (Maynard, 2017) or

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<sup>43</sup>Due to the persistence of this national self-image despite consistent, egregious racial violence in Canada; for example, see Gowriluk and Hatherly (2020).

<sup>44</sup>Examples unfortunately abound, from the deaths of Indigenous children forced into residential schools, to the exclusion and stigmatization of Chinese immigrants; see Young (2015) and Stanley (2011).

Chinese-Canadian youth protesting segregation (Stanley, 2011), Canada has long failed to offer racialized students a learning environment equal to their white peers.

Bullying and harassment of racialized students is influenced by gender differences (Larochette et al., 2010) at least for binary cisgender students. While there is limited data on the experiences within schools of racialized students who are also trans, studies examining the experiences of trans adults shows that racialized people are disproportionately targeted with transphobic abuse in addition to racist abuse (Marcellin et al., 2013).

Canadian School Board policies which address race and other factors likely to make students the target of discrimination typically fail to address possible overlap between identities (Airton et al., 2022; Fox & Ore, 2010; Loutzenheiser, 2015; Martino et al., 2022b). Because this possibility is not explicitly addressed, there is no recourse for students who may experience other forms of discrimination (e.g., gender discrimination) more frequently or severely because of their racial identity. For example, a black lesbian student might experience more homophobic harassment than a white lesbian student. In this case, she is a more common target for harassment due to the influence of her race even if the direct harassment was not explicitly racial. Below, more specific elements of the three highlighted racial groups (Indigenous, Black, and Asian peoples) are examined in tandem with culture.<sup>45</sup>

### **The Relationship of Culture to Discrimination, Youth, and Education**

There are multiple ways to define culture. This dissertation uses the definition that culture refers to the collective behaviours, beliefs and symbolism which signify belonging within

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<sup>45</sup>Which is often entwined with racialized abuse to shape outcomes; for example, see Henry (2002) or Maroto and Aylsworth (2016).

human societies, and are transmitted intergenerationally by a combination of formal and informal methods (Jahoda, 2012).

Canada has long been touted as a haven of multiculturalism. Like many high immigration countries, it is common for people living in Canada to belong to more than one cultural group (Craig & Richeson, 2014). However, what most see as mainstream 'Canadian' culture can be traced back to British customs (and other European countries) with strong influences from the United States (Frizzell & Pammett, 1996). 'Mainstream' Canadian culture is given precedence over other cultural practices (Henry, 2002). Students in Canada with ties to two or more cultural backgrounds will see one of their identities sidelined.

Students are also more likely to be targeted for harassment if they have cultural heritage from a country that is seen as lower status (Maroto & Aylsworth, 2016). This could become increasingly common as immigration to Canada from 'low-status' countries is on the rise (Statistics Canada, 2017). Students from various cultural backgrounds may not push for inclusion of their culture in their school environment. Particularly in the younger grades, youth are concerned with conformity (Matuk & Ruggirello, 2007) and fitting into school culture. School culture which is likely to be 'mainstream' Canadian culture.

### **Indigenous Youth in Canada: Race and Culture**

For hundreds of years, Indigenous peoples in Canada have had to resist the aggressive efforts of colonizers to systematically destroy their cultural heritage (Price, 2013; Stasiulis & Yuval-Davis, 1995) and violently overwrite it with colonial values (Campbell et al., 2024; Chacaby & Plummer, 2016; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2012, 2016). Indigenous youth who were forcibly taken from their homes and held at residential schools

were stripped of anything representing their culture (clothing, keepsakes, etc.) and told their culture was inferior and shameful (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2016). Within the White culture they were forced to inhabit, many Indigenous people memorized these new values out of necessity to avoid further punishment and victimization (Campbell et al., 2024; Dickason et al., 2023).

As adults, the child victims of these residential schools had internalized the ideas of their captors and felt shame over their home communities or expression of their heritage (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2012). The impact of this treatment would be felt for many generations. Not only did Indigenous people leave school indelibly marked by abuse (Barnes, 2018), but their captivity<sup>46</sup> interrupted the transmission of cultural values, practices and knowledge (MacDonald, 2012).

Indigenous youth may shy away from expressions of their cultural heritage within school due to the ongoing trauma of the past. Canada's history of disrespecting and denigrating Indigenous cultures (Smith, 2009) is not easily reversed by professed commitments to cultural acceptance now (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2012). Despite surface commitments to reparation, Canada has largely upheld a legacy of white supremacy (Price, 2011, 2013) where Indigenous peoples are concerned (Campbell et al., 2024; Dickason et al., 2023; Gilmore, 2021; Leroux, 2019; Sunga, 2017).

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<sup>46</sup>The use of the term 'captivity' is deliberate here. In reference to Residential Schools and the imprisonment of Indigenous children there, the expressions 'victim,' 'captive,' 'forced/forcibly' are used to underscore the criminal nature of the events despite their taking place "legally" within the colonial government of the time. These terms also reference the language used by survivors who spoke at the Truth and Reconciliation hearings (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2012, 2016).

Canadian society has long resisted incorporating Indigenous cultures into institutional spaces such as schools (Clarke et al., 2019; Gilmore, 2021; Stasiulis & Yuval-Davis, 1995).<sup>47</sup> A microcosm of this resistance can be seen in recent events at a school in British Columbia. In an act of supreme colonial irony, a non-Indigenous parent objected to the use of smudging<sup>48</sup> in her child's school (Clarke et al., 2019).<sup>49</sup> The parent's objection was couched in religious freedom, objecting to the spiritual elements of smudging. Ironically, the laws she sought to invoke are precedented on preventing religious majorities<sup>50</sup> excluding or stigmatizing religious minorities.

Within Canada, Indigenous spirituality is far from a majority religion. Whether or not this parent's objections end up with the support of the Canadian legal system, it is audacious to bring forth such an objection in a country where Christian religions played a central role in decimating Indigenous cultures (e.g., Gilmore, 2021; Young, 2015). It is also representative of a larger problem where expectations of White racial dominance are often couched in terms of 'freedom of expression' or 'religious freedom,' (Li, 1995) with these tools used as a pretext for enforcement of the possessive and entitled attitudes of white citizens within Canada.

### **Black Youth in Canada: Race and Culture**

Black youth also face a complex cultural history within Canada. Canada's Eurocentric roots played an aggressive role in erasing the cultures of origin of many Black Canadians

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<sup>47</sup>When Indigenous culture is allowed to be present, it is with a hetero- and cis- normative lens imposed unless this practice is actively challenged (Denommé-Welch & Mizzi, 2023; Wilson et al., 2019). Norms in Indigenous culture have been forcibly shifted by colonialism toward cis-centric and hetero-centric views, and reclamation/restoration of cultural practices work to combat these influences (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2022).

<sup>48</sup>A culturally and spiritually significant act within Indigenous cultures (Clarke et al., 2019).

<sup>49</sup>A location which through colonization infringes on the ancestral lands of Indigenous nations; in this case the Tseshaht (Ćišaaʔath) Nation (Dewhirst, 2018) and the Hupacasath (Hupačasath) Nation (Dewhirst, 2021).

<sup>50</sup>In past decisions, Christian religions (Clarke et al., 2019).

(Taylor, 2020). In Canada, Black youth continue to be cast as academically inferior and/or less interested in academics than their peers (Black Communities Demographic Project, 2010; Codjoe, 2001; Jean-Paul, 2013; Maynard, 2017; Smith et al., 2005). Meanwhile, the cultural principles of education and evaluation from these students' own ethnic and cultural background are often ignored (e.g., Hampton, 2010).

Black community leaders and activists have a long history within Canada of rallying for culturally informed schooling for Black youth (e.g., Hampton, 2010; Ware et al., 2020). Whether or not it is a conscious part of daily life, Black youth of all backgrounds are attending school in a country whose central culture was once used to enslave and dehumanize people who looked like them (Maynard, 2017). Perhaps due in part to this fraught history, acknowledgement of Black culture, identities and accomplishments is often absent in Canadian schools (Codjoe, 2001; Hampton, 2010; Jean-Paul, 2013) which hampers Black youths' ability to aspire and achieve on par with their peers. It is important for them to receive attention in research.

This is a challenge to do with nuance because of the small numbers of specific ethno-cultural groups among Black students in Canada, which necessitate a collective category of analysis. Grouping broad and diasporic origins as 'Black' oversimplifies and essentializes regional differences. However, two issues make this a necessity.

First, due to the history of enslavement and oppression in Canada, some Black people may be unaware of their more specific origins (Maynard, 2017). The moniker 'Black' captures their racialization experiences. Second, to avoid compromising the anonymity of youth who are part of a small ethno-cultural group, multiple ethnically Black identities are grouped as 'Black' (in the first survey) or 'Black African' and 'Black Caribbean' (in the second survey). This is

intended to allow potential shared racialization experiences of these students to be examined. The tension between correctly identifying youths' racialization experiences and respecting their anonymity is not resolved here. Because of the very low numbers of trans youth who indicated a racialized identity, all racialized identities are examined grouped in analyses. However, the nuance of identity should still be discussed and the reasons for grouping acknowledged. Hopefully, future works can continue to consider how to avoid erasing nuances of racialized identity wherever it is safely possible to do so.

### **Asian Youth in Canada: Race and Culture**

Youth of Asian descent in Canadian schools also navigate a history of cultural and racial discrimination. The Asian diaspora has been a part of the country called Canada since the early days of colonization, though the colonial government has treated them significantly worse than white immigrants (Stanley, 2011). Chinese immigrants were exploited for labour but blocked from immigration, civil rights and other privileges bestowed on European colonists (Price, 2011) when their numbers threatened white colonizers' power of majority.

Circumstances improved for Asian communities in Canada over the years, though only after sustained activism and advocacy (Lake, 2020; Stanley, 2011). However, perceived links between the COVID-19 pandemic and China have caused heightened violence to be directed at those believed to be Chinese in nationality or descent (e.g., Liu, 2021).

One difficulty in discussing the issues within Canada in attitudes to Asian culture and race is the enormous population and diversity within the continent of Asia. 'Asian' people are not a homogenous group, but the term Asian is used inconsistently throughout the literature

(e.g., Archer & Francis, 2006). In this dissertation, 'Asian' is defined with the examples Chinese, Japanese and Korean while Southeast Asian and South Asian are separate options.

In research with younger people, grouping several identities under the moniker 'Asian' is often deemed necessary to protect the privacy of individual contributors to the research.<sup>51</sup> Gathering categories of nationality which can be expected to correspond to a relatively small population within Canada may not sufficiently protect the anonymity of students who belong to these groups. Grouping smaller proportions together allows for analysis of groups which would otherwise be too small to be used with most comparative methods. As a result, however, research that uses these groupings sacrifices the ability to differentiate between the associated countries in analysis.

Broadly, young Asians can be subject to the 'model minority' myth and the perception that they are invariably high achieving in certain areas, and do not experience the negatives of discrimination (Lee & Trifonas, 2020; Yi et al., 2023). People of Asian descent in Canada may see this as a useful perspective where they more easily assimilate in mainstream colonizer societies and benefit from being 'good citizens' (Lee, 2017), or internalize this view and impose it on themselves (Yi et al., 2023). This perspective essentially denies the existence of the overt discrimination that Asian people experience (Archer & Francis, 2006). The basis of this denial is that 'positive' stereotypes (Lee, 2017) cannot be harmful, and/or that negative sides to the stereotypes do not exist (Bablak et al., 2016). This denial of their lived experiences could potentially exacerbate the harm of the discrimination Asian students encounter in schools.

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<sup>51</sup>See discussion of options offered for Black youth in the prior section.

Accounts of discrimination specific to trans people of Asian ancestry are beginning to emerge (e.g., API Equality Northern California, 2020; Ueng-McHale, 2024) and often examines small, specific groups (Gorse et al., 2021; Thai et al., 2021). Relative to the diverse populations who can be grouped as 'Asian' the academic information available about how trans identity influences discrimination is still limited but growing (for examples, see Lerner & Lee, 2022; Tan et al., 2022; Tan & Weisbart, 2023).

### **The Relationship of LGBTQ<sup>52</sup> Identity to Discrimination, Youth, and Education**

Sexuality has been shown by the First National School Climate Survey to be a significant factor in students' experiences of safety, comfort and belonging (Taylor & Peter, 2011a). Adults may stand by in silence or allow the abuse out of their own discriminatory belief that it will make the targeted students more likely to be heterosexual (Taylor & Peter, 2011a). This behaviour creates a school culture where lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer students are uncertain whether they can turn to the adults around them when they are targeted for discrimination.

LGBTQ students go to class every day surrounded by slang and commentary that denigrates them and their identities; almost half of contributing students heard terms like 'dyke', and 'fag' daily and the majority also heard expressions like 'that's so gay' (Peter et al., 2021; Taylor & Peter, 2011a). The casual and regular use of these insults, whether as direct verbal harassment or used as a general negative, likely ensures that LGBTQ students do not expect acceptance and respect in their school halls.

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<sup>52</sup>'LGBTQ' here refers to minority sexual identities, defined for this purpose as any identity which is not strictly heterosexual. Also referred to as 'queer' where this is more appropriate or used in reference to other sources.

The First National School Climate Survey (Taylor & Peter, 2011a) showed that more than half of LGBTQ [sic]<sup>53</sup> students felt unsafe at school; likely due to the verbal, physical and/or sexual harassment which has been experienced by these students in varying proportions. Worryingly, even having an LGBTQ [sic]<sup>54</sup> parent resulted in students feeling similarly unsafe.

This indirect targeting indicates how strongly any connection to queerness can affect students' school experience. This could also explain why few students intervened as allies when they hear homophobic language. Any association with queerness could invite the same abuse; but without anyone speaking up, the number of young people who collectively wish to oppose this can remain invisible. LGBTQ students will likely feel isolated and stigmatized if oppressive transphobic and/or homophobic behaviour is permitted with varying degrees of openness in the halls of their schools.

Heterosexual youth are not exempt from the negative effects of this oppressive anti-LGBTQ\* [sic]<sup>55</sup> culture either. Students who are targeting others for homophobic harassment recognize this as a tool to exert power over their peers regardless of actual gender or sexual orientation, because of the negative connotations associated with LGBTQ\* identities.<sup>56</sup>

Homophobia is a particular tool of toxic masculinity and the gendered social hierarchy (for example, see Lapointe, 2015; Petersen, 1998). Homophobic insults in casual use are less about a genuine belief that the target is attracted to their own gender, and more about

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<sup>53</sup>The initialism used collectively for the gender and sexuality minority community in this dissertation is '2SLGBTQIA+', and the term for sexual minority only is '2SLGBQIA+'. However, the specific term used here is consistent with the language of the survey referenced.

<sup>54</sup>See Footnote 53.

<sup>55</sup>See Footnote 53.

<sup>56</sup>While this is a different form of oppressive behaviour than anti-LGBTQ\* language motivated strictly by genuine hatred of LGBTQ\* people, it continues to perpetuate and reinforce negative ideas about 2SLGBTQIA+ people (as well as distress and oppress LGBTQ\* students who hear it; Peter et al., 2021; Taylor & Peter, 2011a).

targeted derision conflating aspects of identity with queerness (e.g., femininity) to assert control over male peers (Nagoshi et al., 2008). This serves to enforce and maintain the status quo, and reward 'traditionally' masculine expression.

### **Summary: Marginalized Identities and Trans People**

A trans person is not only subject to discrimination based on gender. They are also more likely to experience discrimination based on their other identities (e.g., Arayasirikul & Wilson, 2019; Marcellin et al., 2013).<sup>57</sup> Trans youth are at a unique intersection of vulnerability. (1) They are too young to seek out environments of daily life where they are more accepted. The government requires them to attend school until at least 16 years of age (Government of Canada, n.d.). (2) There are few enough trans students in schools that they can be easily singled out for harassment. (3), institutions they attend may be less motivated to create specific supports for them compared to larger identity groups if there is limited funding which must be used in a way which benefits the largest number of students.

The neglect of trans people in research, visibility and education means that there is less general knowledge about them, and fewer formal supports available to help with their needs. Institutions are slow in the provision of formal protections and policies (Loutzenheiser, 2015). Poor understanding of gender in the general population results in gender and sexuality being conflated (Suen et al., 2020; Tam & Hines, 2010). This means homophobic violence can be directed at trans youth, with aggressors unlikely to be concerned with the accuracy of their discriminatory behaviour.

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<sup>57</sup>This exacerbation of other marginalization is not limited to gender. Many intersections of marginalized identity produce distinct negative experiences and trauma (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991).

Trans youth face a complex reception by the world, and this is further complicated by how the world treats and receives their other identities. Racialization and LGBTQ\* identities are all embedded in the social and cultural environment of Canada outlined above. The ways this dissertation approaches these identities and how they are defined is shaped by a theoretical framework, discussed below.

### Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

This dissertation research is shaped throughout by feminist theory, social constructionism, and queer theory. Below each theory is defined as it is used in this work and discussed in relation to the dissertation topic and the other two theories. The latter section includes discussion of the limitation and critiques for each theory, particularly in how those impact the use of the theory in relation to this work.

Some of the theories used in this dissertation, such as feminist theory, remain critical of formal academia as a key arbiter of epistemology.<sup>58</sup> Mainstream academic works often dismiss or devalue the ways of knowing by which women and other marginalized groups often contribute to the world (e.g., Braun et al., 2014; Crichlow et al., 1990; Kovach, 2010; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012) outside of the formal academic production of knowledge.<sup>59</sup>

A significant proportion of these formative academic works are “malestream” (Code, 1991) meaning largely representative of men’s perspectives. In addition, many of the records upon which more recent works in higher education are based were created, approved and/or conducted by white men (Andres & Adamuti-Trache, 2008; Cotterill & Letherby, 2005; Martínez Alemán & Renn, 2002). Women, people of color, and in particular women of color still struggle today for equal chances to become faculty and guide the production of academic knowledge (Samuel & Wane, 2005). To gain admission even as students,<sup>60</sup> women in Canada and other countries (Cotterill & Letherby, 2005; Martínez Alemán & Renn, 2002; McCargar, 2016) faced

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<sup>58</sup>For example, Baldwin (2020) offers an outline of the alienation of many marginalized women's voices from academic epistemologies, as documented by feminist scholars.

<sup>59</sup>The expert source of the only 'legitimate' knowledge (Code, 1991).

<sup>60</sup>Which did not occur until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and not in any significant number until much later. For example, see Andres and Adamuti-Trache (2007) or Robbins and Simpson (2009).

multiple official and unofficial barriers (McCargar, 2016).<sup>61</sup> Women and other genders<sup>62</sup> have continued to be underrepresented in academic posts today (Ceci et al., 2014; Lynn et al., 2019) and overrepresented in less prestigious positions even as these groups form larger proportions of graduating classes (Pickel & Sivachandran, 2024; Robbins & Simpson, 2009; Wolverton et al., 2015).

Gender representation and representation of other minoritized groups in research matters because our perspectives shape the research we create (Code, 1991; Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014; Ganga & Scott, 2006; McCorkel & Myers, 2003; McGarry, 2016; Parson, 2019). Critically interrogating the assumptions which the underlie the foundations relied on to build toward this point in research helps contextualize the work for the reader.

This dissertation, like all similar works of research, is not an objective work of pure truth. It is created by a person (myself) with their own experience and perspectives. It is also built on the work of others who brought their own subjective lens to their work (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). Below, the theories used to structure the ontological and epistemological perspective of this research are discussed.

### **Feminist Theory**

Feminist theory can in practice refer to a diverse range of definitions and applications of theory all termed “feminist theory” (Hesse-Biber, 2012a). Feminist theories often disagree on the importance of different axes of identity, as well as the methods proposed to address inequalities (Lykke, 2010). This can create confusion if ‘feminist theory’ is referenced obliquely

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<sup>61</sup>Formal barriers such as admissions policies barring their gender, and informal barriers such as popular theories that education would make women unmarriageable (McCargar, 2016).

<sup>62</sup>As well as other minority groups.

as a monolith, rather than being explicitly defined as used in each work.<sup>63</sup> There are many types of feminist theory (hooks, 2000a), and strengths and drawbacks abound. Some early feminist theories centred white women (Carbado & Harris, 2019; Moon & Holling, 2020; Upadhyay, 2021), lacked considerations of poverty and class (e.g., Friedan, 1963; see Tobias, 1997 for useful context), or deliberately excluded queer women (Strolovitch & Crowder, 2018). From this point on, when 'feminist theory' is mentioned in this dissertation it refers to the definition given in this section.

In this dissertation, feminist theory is defined as a "critical interrogation and re-imagining of sexist gender roles" (hooks, 2000a, xii) as well as an active analysis of how marginalized axes of identity impact philosophical, theoretical and epistemological discourse (Hesse-Biber, 2012b). Feminist theory helps to challenge the notion that there is a single objective version of knowledge available (Maxey, 1999). Some feminists are interested in the experiences of the 'other' as legitimate knowledge (Hesse-Biber, 2012b), and as representing a standpoint from which the observer might see a truer version of the world which is hidden from those with more privilege ("standpoint theory" or "standpoint feminisms;" Harding, 1993; Longino, 1993; McCorkel & Myers, 2003). When feminist theory is used in this dissertation, more specifically it is employing standpoint feminism as described here.

This definition can also be captured by historian Joan Scott's statement that "experience is shaped by one's particular context—by specific circumstances, conditions, values, and relations of power, each influencing how one articulates "experience"" (Scott, 1999, in Hesse-

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<sup>63</sup>There is also precedent among feminist theorists for acknowledging this multiplicity of feminisms as a necessity, and a strength, of an outlook which seeks to avoid oversimplification (Harnois, 2013).

Biber, 2012b, p. 7). This is the working definition of feminist theory used in this work, which draws on the work of hooks (2000a, 2000b), Collins (2000), Code (1991) and others.<sup>64</sup>

This definition is deliberately less complex and more carefully bounded than definitions of feminist theory given in works focused solely on that topic. It would be impossible in the space of this dissertation to adequately address the complex history of feminist theories and the critiques and disagreements within. The boundaries given on the definition here are intended to provide a practical limit on the concept as used here. The complexities of feminist thought and the applications on research with trans youth are a rich area of theory which informs movements and perspectives across disciplines.

At minimum, feminist theory prompts researchers to contextualize research within the gendered power structures it arises from (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004). Established literature is used to build new research, so the effect of researchers' perspectives can be far reaching. Throughout the past century groups in various positions of social advantage (e.g., men; Maxey, 1999) are overrepresented as constructors of knowledge. Their overrepresentation means that much of the literature on which others build is marked by a masculine perspective, as “knowledge is a construct that bears the mark of its constructors” (Code, 1991, p. 55). Research is performed by adult professionals, so it will bear the mark of adult perspectives as well.

Knowledge drawn from groups such as youth, where the group is in a subordinate (e.g., disenfranchised) position, may conflict with the knowledge presented in official and/or institutional narratives (Code, 1991; hooks, 2000c; McCorkel & Myers, 2003). Rendering visible the roles of people outside the group (in this case, adults) in processing and presenting the

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<sup>64</sup>Such as Brickell (2006), Connell (1990), and Hesse-Biber (2012c).

results of data from youth can help mitigate the effect of adult influence. This can draw attention to any effect adult framing might affect youths' epistemological contributions.<sup>65</sup> This gives the researcher an opportunity to correct the influence but also provides the reader the opportunity to take this framing into account in their own interpretation of results.

Feminist theory helps to contextualize the quantitative results which make this study so unique. While gender minority youth are difficult to reach in sufficient numbers for quantitative analysis,<sup>66</sup> it is also difficult to get a sense of the needs of the group rather than isolated individuals when examining in-depth qualitative works. This dissertation pairs theory with quantitative results so that the epistemological assumptions involved in quantitative research can be a visible part of the work. Conclusions are then presented with appropriate context.

Overall, feminist theory<sup>67</sup> (particularly standpoint feminism) emphasizes the value and reliability of the trans students in the dataset as a viewpoint which actually has advantages in authenticity over more privileged views (Harding, 1993; Kenny & Kinsella, 1997; Longino, 1993). Feminist theory also provides the structure from which to critique my own role as researcher handling their data (Iskander, 2018; Kwon, 2013). Finally, feminist theory emphasizes the need to illuminate the power structures at work (de Beauvoir, 1953) and account for their influence if possible.

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<sup>65</sup>By making overt reference to the roles which I and others have in performing this research, I hope to keep salient for the reader the possible influence that these perspectives could have on the results in this dissertation and remind readers to interpret within that context.

<sup>66</sup>Which encourages the use of qualitative methods where fewer participants are required.

<sup>67</sup>As defined for use in this dissertation.

This use of feminist theory in practical application can be described using three focal points drawn by Alison Wylie from Helen Longino's work on doing science as feminist (Wylie, 2012). These are epistemic values, ontological concerns, and normative and pragmatic values.

Epistemic values refer here to the assertion that feminist social scientists have a strong interest in authentically interpreting empirical evidence and finding new perspectives (Longino, 1993). The ontological concerns refer to the treatment of people as diverse and unique beings, affected by complex interactions which not only could explain outcomes, but are a necessity in successfully understanding outcomes from research conducted with human subjects. Some feminist researchers are concerned with knowledge that can be useful to the current issues of the human condition, and in creating that knowledge from balanced perspectives of equal value (Wylie, 2012).

This 3-point idea of feminist research is an apt description of how feminist theory is applied in this dissertation to the unique position of Canadian trans students. They are youth (minors), with a consciousness of the constraints and forced lack of responsibility for their own welfare which they face (Fish et al., 2020). Youth are “[p]eople whose politically constructed and enforced lack of autonomy...[renders them] dependent and subject to paternalistic control” (Code, 1991, p. 73).

Offering young people who are shut out of legal constructions of knowledge a way to participate in research if they choose (though still adhering to the existing power and value

structures, like school approval and permissions, which are legal obligations) provides an opportunity to subvert the power structures which keep them marginalized.<sup>68</sup>

Informed by feminist theory, this dissertation will work to organize and present the contributions of trans youth without overtaking or overshadowing them. Trans youth from groups historically divested of power more likely to be targets of discrimination (based on previous research; e.g., Veale et al., 2017b). This renders them less able to influence the constructions of knowledge which shape their environments. Recentring the perspective of trans youth will hopefully help to disrupt the dominant narrative of what works in schools and bring focus to a previously unseen perspective.

### **Criticisms, Limitations, and Connections**

In this dissertation, the theoretical framework was crafted with the goal of some theories balancing the limitations and criticisms of others. Because the section on feminist theory appears first, the bulk of the connections will be presented in the later sections to allow the discussion of content introduced here.

Feminist theory (and feminism as a movement) has been criticized at times for centring the experiences of white women (Mohanty, 2003; Moreton-Robinson, 2021), often by Black, Indigenous, and anti-racist feminists (Kenny & Ebscohost, 2023; Meisenbach & Valiavska, 2025; Moreton-Robinson, 2021). The values and goals of feminist theory (particularly in early feminist movements) have often been expressed in Eurocentric terms (Christoffersen & Emejulu,

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<sup>68</sup>Striving to treat youth as full and complete human beings whose needs have been to some extent sublimated by their social position acknowledges that they are as a rule not treated as full participants in society (Kwon, 2013). This dissertation works to present trans youth a tool with which to provide their experience of marginalization (in this case, by both the adult population and the cisgender population of their peers) while avoiding backlash or retaliatory consequences.

2023).<sup>69</sup> The positions of authority which largely allow white men to dominate Western epistemological discourses shifted with feminism to first to allow white women access (Christoffersen & Emejulu, 2023). As a result, some white women who gained authority worked to actively reinforce their place in the racialized hierarchy (Moon & Holling, 2020).<sup>70</sup>

The white women who have driven these parts of feminist movements have largely been representative of privileged groups on most axes other than gender (hooks, 2000a; Kenny & Ebscohost, 2023). This results in efforts to focus on gender as if it is a single issue which can be separated from other aspects of identity (advocating for gender equality on the basis of a shared 'generic womanhood'; Spelman, 1988). If a feminist theorist is able-bodied, cisgender and Christian<sup>71</sup> they may be more likely to advocate for gender as if it is the single and most important axis of marginalization (e.g., see hooks, 2000a on the exclusion of race and class, and see ; Hutcheon & Lashewicz, 2020 on the exclusion of ableism).

Feminist theories which do examine other forms of marginalization are sometimes criticized for focusing on theory and academia rather than undertaking practical work to help marginalized groups (Moreton-Robinson, 2021; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012). However, many feminist movements do follow through on work to actively abolish oppressive practices. Black Feminism (hooks, 1989; Kiesling, 2017), transnational feminism (Mohanty, 2003), anti-colonial feminism

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<sup>69</sup>With other theorists positioned as alternative, less valuable, not formally authoritative or reliable (Eprecht, 2013; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012).

<sup>70</sup>While this is not consistent with the stated goals of feminism and feminist theory to seek equality for all groups (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) it is an undeniably characteristic of feminist movements and theory (Christoffersen & Emejulu, 2023; Kenny & Ebscohost, 2023; Meisenbach & Valiavska, 2025; Moon & Holling, 2020; Moreton-Robinson, 2021).

<sup>71</sup>A religion privileged and centred in North America (Clarke et al., 2019).

(Harding et al., 2022; Mestre, 2016; Wane et al., 2013) and indigenous feminism (Anderson, 2020) provide excellent examples of feminism(s) in practice.

Black, Indigenous, transnational, intersectional and anti-racist feminist theorists have done much to create feminist theories which are not bound to whiteness. However, it is still important to acknowledge the roots of white feminism<sup>72</sup> which could still affect feminist work.<sup>73</sup> Black Feminist theory (hooks, 2000a), intersectional feminist theory (Lykke, 2010), and transnational feminist theory (Hundle et al., 2019) have each provided valuable criticisms of the centring of whiteness in feminist projects.

Centring white women is arguably the most prominent critique of feminist theory (many authors refer to this as white western feminism, distinguishing these feminist theories from those that challenge and critique them; for example, Parasram 2019). This issue is partly alleviated in this dissertation by the focus on trans, nonbinary and/or gender nonconforming people rather than women. White women have social privileges relative to other marginalized groups which can facilitate social dominance (DiAngelo 2020) when men are excluded from consideration of power within the group. Trans youth lack the privileges to centre themselves over others, and complicate narratives of gender by bringing up questions about how gender is defined and bounded (Butler, 1990).

Centering whiteness and/or European values is still a possibility in this research, and being conscious of this possibility in feminist theory has helped guide the decision on which

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<sup>72</sup>Where white women are positioned both as a 'default' women (Spelman, 1988) and/or as superior to other women (Meisenbach & Valiavska, 2025; Mohanty, 2003; Moon & Holling, 2020; Moreton-Robinson, 2021; Samuel & Wane, 2005)

<sup>73</sup>For example, narratives of white women 'rescuing' women of other groups rather than showing them allyship or solidarity are stealthily entwined in the work and theory of feminism. Actions commonly seen when one group dominates another (Freire, 2000).

theorists to rely on. The gender binary itself can be a by-product of whiteness, transported all over the world by European invaders<sup>74</sup> (Upadhyay, 2021) into countries for whom more numerous genders were part of social and cultural life.<sup>75</sup> In this dissertation, the works of non-European scholars, activists and theorists (for example, Epprecht, 2013; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012) help queer the traditional European ideas of both gender binaries and research (Bexley et al., 2023; Jackson & Sullivan, 1999; Schmidt, 2010) for an intentionally complicated view of gender.

Gender is not a simple lens in analysis when applied to trans, nonbinary and/or gender nonconforming people because these diverse identities demand nuance.<sup>76</sup> Gender diversity troubles the simplistic categories of ‘men’ and ‘women’ which have formed the basis of many feminist theories (Brickell, 2006; Connell, 1990; Josephson et al., 2017). Due to trans youth being the topic under study, a simplistic focus on gender is unlikely to be a problem in this case. However, this criticism of feminist theory is still useful as a reminder not to essentialize trans youth as only their gender (however complex it may be).<sup>77</sup>

Intersectionality theory helps as well to address the potential issue of white women being at the centre of feminist theories. Intersectionality theory (discussed below) was created by Black feminists to articulate the issue of feminist theory overlooking its own racially hegemonic nature (Crenshaw, 1989). In addition, intersectionality in practical terms means that

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<sup>74</sup>Binary ideas of gender are also maintained by colonial systems in Canada and other countries today (Bexley et al., 2023; Hodge et al., 2019; Schmidt, 2010).

<sup>75</sup>Such as the territory now divided into the countries called Canada (Taylor & Peter, 2011a) and the United States (Bosson et al., 2019), as well as México (Mirandé, 2014), India (Woltmann, 2020), and Hawai’i (Robertson, 1989) for example.

<sup>76</sup>Though there are ontological and epistemological tensions between feminist theory (particularly standpoint feminism) and other theories, such as queer theory, in how gender is viewed, defined and incorporated into research and individual identity. This is addressed after the section on queer theory to allow that theory to be discussed in full first.

<sup>77</sup>It also suggests framing analysis with consideration of their other identities even if the measure of those identities is not available.

identity in research must be addressed in how it can be shaped by other identities, rather than viewing an aspect of identity (gender, race, and so on) in isolation. Intersectionality theory and its use in this dissertation is discussed in-depth in the next section.

### **Intersectionality Theory**

Intersectionality was conceptualized by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1991), an innovative Black feminist scholar. Crenshaw created a comprehensive framework for use in examining the intersection of identities; in particular, of race and gender. While intersectionality theory has gone on to become a prominent part of feminist scholarship (Carbado et al., 2013; Carbado & Harris, 2019; Cho et al., 2013; Christensen & Jensen, 2012; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991), there are valid criticisms of its use.

Use of intersectionality theory has been criticized as often being half-hearted rather than a genuine and engaged practice (Bowleg, 2008; Christoffersen & Emejulu, 2023; Collins, 2019; Davis, 2008). This dilutes the hard work of the largely Black women scholars who founded and developed intersectionality theory. This dissertation intentionally draws an understanding of intersectionality theory mainly from the seminal work of Black women scholars such as Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins (Carbado & Harris, 2019; Collins, 2000, 2019; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991).

Intersectionality is “an insistence on examining the dynamics of difference and sameness” (Cho et al., 2013: 787) along multiple axes of power<sup>78</sup>. Most commonly, race and gender are the axes of power advanced. This has at times limited the critical focus to an

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<sup>78</sup>Many of which are also called identity in this paper, in deference to how they are referred to in their source material and/or other theories which shape the project.

examination of race and womanhood, and in particular Black women (Carbado et al., 2013). This is natural, as intersectionality theory was created to highlight the harms caused to this group using single-lens perspectives on inequality (Crenshaw, 1991).

Intersectionality theory has commonality with standpoint feminism in viewing people with overlapping confluences of identity (e.g., Black feminists) as holding a unique perspective (hooks, 1989; Kenny & Kinsella, 1997).

On the surface, this dissertation primarily employs two lenses which have long been overly centred in intersectionality theory: race and gender. However, intersectionality theory is rarely a viable option in the quantitative analysis of trans experiences. Samples drawn from trans populations are typically small that including further axes of power can render sample sizes ineligible for any kind of meaningful analysis. This dissertation represents a unique opportunity to examine the experiences of the intersection of trans, nonbinary, and/or gender nonconforming identities with racialization.

Racial identity was particularly salient in North America during the time of the Second School Climate Survey for Indigenous, Black, and Asian people due to specific sociopolitical events. In addition to the indignities of ongoing colonization, Indigenous people have become increasingly visible as targets of injustices both past and present. In recent years mass graves have been discovered at residential school sites, while at the same time young Indigenous people are killed in police custody at an alarming rate (Gilmore, 2021; Gowriluk & Hatherly, 2020). Black people within Canada have witnessed global protests sparked by the deaths of Black Canadians and Black Americans at the hands of law enforcement (Maynard, 2017; though notably, focus is largely on the latter; Simpson, 2020). Asian people, primarily those of Chinese

descent (or perceived to be) have experienced racial violence as a result of the pandemic being linked to China in news coverage (Liu, 2021) and anti-Asian views actively encouraged by U.S. political leaders (United Nations, 2020).

The links between race and gender are far from simple in these circumstances. Racial discrimination is covered regularly in the media (Simpson, 2020). Other marginalized identities are also kept salient in the public sphere through media saturation. Increasing numbers of trans youth are visible in Canada through media coverage (Nash & Browne, 2021) as well as simply living out as themselves in Canadian schools. These changes in trans visibility have prompted backlash from religious groups and conservative “heteroactivists” (p. 78) whose ideologies oppose the decentering of their binary gender views (Nash & Browne, 2021). Despite the increase in positive visibility and relatively more common presence in schools (suggesting a rise in perceived acceptance of trans people), there are equally visible levels of hate and violence which often dominate media coverage of trans communities (e.g., Bauer & Scheim, 2015).

Intersectionality theory posits that a trans student and a racialized student will both experience marginalization in this context, but the shape this marginalization takes will be different (Crenshaw, 1991).<sup>79</sup> Most of the trans students in Canada’s schools are white (Peter et al., 2021; Taylor & Peter, 2011a), and may derive some advantage from the systems of white supremacy which surround them.<sup>80</sup> White administrators or parents may be less likely to lash out at someone who is a member of their racial in-group (Greenwald et al., 2002). People tend

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<sup>79</sup>Trans youth, for example, may present easier targets if they are also members of a racialized group that other youth may see as acceptable targets for discrimination on that basis.

<sup>80</sup>Compared to racialized trans students.

to treat others better if they share an identity group (Gaertner et al., 1993); for example, race, class or gender.

Many works of North American research on trans youth use a sample with a white majority (e.g., Dank et al., 2014) because this is the most common racial identity in North America.<sup>81</sup> It may be impossible to include racialization and other aspects of identity in studies with trans youth because they are a vanishingly small percentage of the population in most areas. This does not dismiss the usefulness of intersectionality theory. The unavailability of other axes of identity makes intersectionality theory a more essential component of the theoretical framing of this dissertation.

Because other intersections of identity are not available or cannot be addressed without violating students' anonymity, the analyses could easily be conceptualized as representative of trans students in general. But there is no such thing, even with consideration of only gender (Kuper et al., 2012) which is exceptionally diverse among the students collectively referred to as trans in this dissertation. More importantly, many in the group of trans students will be able-bodied, Canadian-born, white and other privileged identities (Statistics Canada, 2017b, 2017c) simply because of how common these identities are.<sup>82</sup> Intersectionality theory unequivocally demonstrates that trans students' other intersections of identity will affect their reception in society.

It is exceptionally important to ensure the results of this dissertation are presented in context, as measures of central tendency among a very diverse group. Trans people are

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<sup>81</sup>Though the White majority could reflect other factors, such as racialized youth having less support to be out or participate in research.

<sup>82</sup>Based on the population level proportions of identities (e.g., Statistics Canada, 2017b, 2017c).

affected and endangered by many other facets of who they are, which can also color their reception as a trans person (Rodriguez-Roldan, 2020). The dataset used in this dissertation cannot be mistaken for a trans generic identity (particularly as there is not such thing as a generic or default person of a certain gender; Spelman, 1988) simply because it would violate students' right to anonymity to capture their other identities.<sup>83</sup> Intersectionality theory provides the context to carefully consider how this research reflects the experiences of trans students who share marginalized identities with other groups.

In this dissertation, the goal of employing intersectionality in a meaningful way had to be shaped around the reasonable expectations of what a young person had the ability, attention, or inclination to complete. It would not be reasonable to expect the youth to spend time acquainting themselves with the definitions needed to answer questions about the performative aspects of race (Carbado et al., 2013), for example, unless perhaps this was the central focus of the survey. Similarly, a young person might not be able to confidently place their family within a given income bracket.

However, the absence of these variables from the measures used to collect the dataset should not be mistaken for their absence from the population. Intersectionality theory suggests the dissertation must be conservative about interpreting the results as representative of the different unique intersections of identity held by trans students.

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<sup>83</sup>Some of these measures (e.g., disability) do not exist in the dataset. But not having a measure of some identities should not be mistaken for their absence, or the absence of the effect they will have on the individuals' lives.

### Criticisms, Limitations, and Connections

To some extent, feminist theory and intersectionality theory are complementary<sup>84</sup>. Both aim to include underrepresented groups in research, and postulate that individual experiences can differ depending on group membership along different axes of power. Intersectionality theory arose from the need to fill a gap in feminist theories, where common characteristics (e.g., gender, racialization) are considered along a single characteristic (Crenshaw, 1989).<sup>85</sup>

To use the examples chosen by Crenshaw, Black women are not separately ‘women’ and ‘Black’. Rather, the sexism they experience is racialized and the racism they experience is gendered. Their experiences are in another category altogether. In the prospective research<sup>86</sup> intersectionality theory builds on feminist theory to help articulate the complex web of identities which contribute to discrimination.

There are also overlapping criticisms of feminist theory and intersectionality theory. Both can be considered too ambiguous and at the same time too complex to be useful (Davis, 2008). However, one of the issues of white supremacy and colonialism has been the oversimplification of axes of power (Price, 2013; Upadhyay, 2021), notably limiting, dismissing, and ignoring the needs of other groups. Because of the multiplicity of feminist theories, feminist theory as defined for the prospective research addresses its own limitation (oversimplification) and criticism (focusing on white women) through the new theorizing of

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<sup>84</sup>Naturally, many (arguably most) feminist theories are now intersectional (Carbado & Harris, 2019; Cho et al., 2013; Christoffersen & Emejulu, 2023), so the two theories are not per se separate. They are treated as separate (to an extent) in this section to allow intersectionality theory to be considered in light of how it has contributed to feminisms and contributes to this work even if dovetailing with feminist theory.

<sup>85</sup>Or, if multiple identities were considered, pre-intersectionality feminist theories often viewed the multiple axes of marginalization as additive rather than interactive (Something many feminist theories which espouse intersectionality are still often criticized for; for example, see Bowleg, 2008).

<sup>86</sup>As in feminist research.

intersectional feminism. Intentionally complex, refusing to be simplified or glib, intersectionality theory centres the practical issues that limited feminist theories' ability to reach their goal of advancing the needs of underrepresented groups.

If actively and critically applied, intersectionality theory insists on the uniqueness of individuals' experiences across shared group memberships (Cho et al., 2013). Intersectionality theory provides the basis for cautious look at aggregate data, and consideration that discussing the results in terms of representation of the group cannot rely on a perceived 'generic' member of the group (Dewar, 1993). In this sense, the open ambiguity of intersectionality is considered by some researchers to be its strength (Davis, 2008). By seeing intersectionality as part of feminist theory,<sup>87</sup> many of the limitations of feminist theory are addressed. Intersectionality theory as inherently complex out of necessity, "a method and a disposition, a heuristic and analytic tool" (Carbado et al., 2013, p. 312). Intersectionality theory's direct opposition to a simple explanation offsets criticisms of feminist theory having too simple a focus on gender.

Intersectionality theory uses categories of identity (e.g., race, gender, ability) to examine how the intersection of identities create complexity and nuance in how the people with those identities are received in social life (McCall, 2005). However, there is another consideration: how are those categories conceived of, constructed, and valued? Queer theory aids in the consideration of where categories come from, as it both uses categories of identities and questions those categories (Kruger & Richter, 2018).

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<sup>87</sup>Or simply taking it in tandem, as it might be alternatively viewed.

## Queer Theory

Queer theory bears similarities to intersectionality theory and feminist theory, as it also aims specifically to challenge an established perspective and problematize easy categories (Halperin, 2003; Kruger & Richter, 2018). Queer theory resists strict definition and boundary (Kruger & Richter, 2018). Central arguments of its' inception with examples of major theorists are provided below to sketch out the definition used in this dissertation.

Queer theory arose in the 1990s to disrupt the established ideas of gender and sexuality (Amory et al., 2022). Roots include postmodern theorists like Foucault (1988) who began to question the construction of sexuality/sexual identity through the lens of history, context, and behaviour (though Foucault did not address gender). Seminal works by Judith Butler (1990, 1993), Eve Sedgwick (1990) and later contributors like Sara Ahmed (2006a, 2006b) created a radical questioning of the categories which were so reliably used in studies of women, gender, and what would later be called 2SLGBTQIA+ communities (Goldberg & Beemyn, 2021; Kruger & Richter, 2018).

Gender and sexuality could be unrecognizable if divorced from context and interpreted by those unfamiliar with its' creation. The opposite could also be true; common forms of gender and sexuality produced in each context could appear natural and innate when viewed from within the system that created and maintained them (Sullivan, 2003).

The supported and rewarded forms of gender and sexuality would then be presented as the pre-existing categories and modeled for future generations to properly perform them (Butler, 1990). Contemporary works on queer theory have posited that Foucault drew on the works of other theorists in the arguments he advanced (which formed part of early queer

theory; Bernini, 2021). Queer theory in early forms arose to challenge feminist ideas of gender which produced hierarchies within the movement (Bernini, 2021). This would develop into a challenge to strict categorization and attempted naturalizations of those categories in many aspects of human life, particularly those which describe identity (Seidman, 1995). In this way queer theory can be difficult to describe, because it "resists the reductionist practice of pretending that it is possible to delineate, once and for all, the necessary and sufficient conditions for membership in any given category" (Marinucci, 2016, p. xii).

The focus in most early queer theory works was on sexuality (e.g., Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*, 1990). Eve Sedgwick discusses the position of heterosexuality relative to other sexualities as unstable, but with an instability that has always been in view (Sedgwick, 1990). Sedgwick notes that heterosexuality is a term dependent on the continuous reconstruction of itself, but this does not remove it from power or cause it to be questioned. Binary expressions<sup>88</sup> are in discursive competition for "material or rhetorical leverage" (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 11) which is required to set the terms through which that aspect of life is viewed, and the advantages therein. Sedgwick (Sedgwick, 1990) pushes to resist generalization and binaries, though deconstructing these categories (in this case, sexuality) will not disarm them. Sex, gender, sexuality and other categories of power hold advantages for a reason. Making these visible and the subject of discussion was the focus of much early queer theory (Kruger & Richter, 2018).

What gender is and is not in static terms, as well as how it affects practices around sexuality, makes gender an inherent part of considerations of sexuality (Butler, 1990; Sullivan,

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<sup>88</sup>Sex, gender, sexuality, but also others.

2003). A useful example is how the definitions which hold binary genders as each other's complement are disrupted by same-gender and multiple-gender attraction (Amory et al., 2022). Non-traditional performances of (binary) gender are often expected, imposed or simply found among LGBTQ+ communities (Edwards, 2009; Hodge et al., 2019; Sullivan, 2003). Questions of gender boundaries and definition are entwined around questioning the naturalization of sexuality and aligning gender there (Ahmed, 2006a).

Judith Butler's seminal work *gender trouble* worked with these issues explicitly. Butler took issue with the idealization of versions of gender (Butler, 1990). In many cases, of women. Idealizing womanhood that inhabiting the expectations of society in turn dictated certain forms of gender to be false, in need of explanation or pathologization compared to those naturalized (Butler, 1990). Butler took issue with creating new gender exclusion and hierarchy within a group of people who were collectively objecting to their marginalization based on gender (e.g., de Beauvoir, 1953). This presented an issue that queer people held insight on. It was the position of heterosexual expectations as natural compared to queer sexuality which led queer people to be pathologized (Ahmed, 2006b; Alimahomed, 2010; Loue, 2020). These categories' differential construction in reference to place, time, context and power (Foucault, 1988) provide a strong argument against them being natural. Queer theory resists essentialism and favours demonstrating the underdetermination<sup>89</sup> of gender and sexuality categories to challenge social hegemonies (Amory et al., 2022; Marinucci, 2016). Largely this means rejection of discrete categorizations being imposed on a complex and messy human existence.

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<sup>89</sup>An insufficiency of empirical evidence.

This can put it at odds with feminist theory and intersectionality theory, which make use of these categories as critical lenses to examine human experience (Ahmed, 2006b). This focus on disrupting the status quo does not have to contradict such theories. Michel Foucault and his assertion of sexuality as historically specific (Foucault, 1988) does not detract from the way the identities of sexuality used in a given time affected the social and cultural contexts in which people lived.

Sara Ahmed (2006b) discusses the inherited conditions of the world in terms of social order, culture and belief among other things. Ahmed's queer phenomenology provides a take on gender and sexuality focused on the space of social relations. Expectations and perceived realities (e.g., within a family for a new child) are disordered by queerness or other expressions of identity at odds with the historical and social expectations. Ahmed's work emphasizes the inherited nature of the world, built by existing conceptions of ourselves and others, "lines" between us expressing where lives are supposed to go. The disruption of these lines affects not only the given moment or person but the expectations for future, and the stability of the entrenched and reinscribed ideas of what is possible. An expectation of cisgender identity, or heterosexuality, is an "accumulation of moments of pressure" (Ahmed, 2006b, p. 16) creating a path that is 'well-trodden'. To follow the metaphor, these moments of pressure create a direction that is easier to follow than others (e.g., heterosexuality), but following this direction is what continually creates the path.

Foucault, Sedgwick, Butler and Ahmed provide a brief scan of the origins around queer theory. Foucault, the postmodern historian who questioned whether it was 'nature' if social context and history created differential sexualities around the same actions (Foucault, 1988).

Sedgwick's material and rhetorical leverage calling into view the unstable but powerfully manipulative bounds of binaries, sexuality or otherwise (Sedgwick, 1990). Butler (1990, 1993) demanding attention to the performance of gender and its' hierarchies of acceptability. Which provide the scaffolding for divisions of power within (motive to maintain a rhetoric of 'acceptable' vs. 'unacceptable' gender). Ahmed, tracking the social relations which connect the lines, directions, orientations of the self and other which are provided based on the formation of categories and their use (Ahmed, 2006b). These theorists are by no means the only contributors<sup>90</sup> to a rich and complex area of scholarship. However, for the sake of brevity the origins of queer theory are limited to the above for this dissertation.

The nomenclature of queer theory references both its applications in its earliest inception<sup>91</sup> and the intention of 'queering' social sciences discourse by challenging the established epistemology, frameworks and procedures. Echoing intersectionality theory, queer theory is notable for many of its proponents focusing on how it is applied in each context (Browne & Nash, 2010) as disruption can take many forms.

For this dissertation, queer theory helps to illuminate the magnitude of the problem that is presented by trans youth, and why their safety, security and well-being may be so easily neglected by those embedded in the systems of Canadian society. Hegemonic beliefs about gender and sexuality provide no name or framework for understanding trans youth (Ahmed, 2006b), and ample motivation to dismiss or discredit them to maintain status quo (Butler, 1993; Edwards, 2009). The existence of trans people disrupts the delicate interconnected

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<sup>90</sup>This is only the briefest overview of their work.

<sup>91</sup>Challenging the establishment of sexuality and gender as stable and definable categories (Halperin, 2003).

relationships of power (Ahmed, 2006b) which produce (and allow people to benefit from participating in) simplistic ideas of gender and sexuality.

Queer theory also informs how tools of data collection are viewed, and the value of disrupting the easy use of definitions, particularly those of gender and sexuality. Rather than hold to discrete categories, this dissertation uses loose groupings justified by how they are to be used. This is not an attempt to avoid precision, but an acknowledgement that the terms used to describe gender (and sexuality, linked by its' inherent definitional relationship) will attempt to circumscribe complex concepts which are definitionally dependent on sociocultural and historical context. Queer theory has prompted an explicit disclosure of the terms of definition and their limits, with an understanding that their accuracy in describing the world is embedded in place and time.

For example, the grouping of racial categories in the survey tool both reflects common definitions<sup>92</sup> and is a grouping of convenience to the method of analysis and the goal of anonymity. Specifying the practical reasons for the general grouping helps to challenge and disrupt the notion that racial categories refer to genuine and discrete categories. The function of queer theory here is also to underline the artificiality of categorization and its' relationship to epistemology. Categories are created for description and research then inferred to be natural and used to define groups for future study.

Further, queer theory is used in this dissertation to critique the tools of the research necessitated by the external structures in which research operates. Researchers are beholden

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<sup>92</sup>To allow the results of this survey to be placed in comparison to other contemporary works in 2SLGBTQIA+ studies.

to a board of research ethics for approval, a system which favors the use of approaches with precedent. By default, studies which have gone before are used to justify studies which apply for permissions. This builds an artificial hierarchy of imitation, in that the validity of the prior tool is justified by its acceptance and confers this authority on applications which replicate it (Butler, 1990). Critiquing this as a system of value is not a dismissal of the practical use of submitting a work which replicates prior success, as research is a time-constrained field.

However, overt discussion of this as the rationale<sup>93</sup> queers the process and renders the internal mechanisms of the process visible (Bernini, 2021). Queer theory presents an inherent challenge to the naturalization of the identity discourse of those in power (Bernini, 2021; Brettschneider et al., 2017) by doubting the hegemonic epistemologies of gender and sexuality as well as the simplistic minority/majority casting which so commonly accompanies them (Butler, 1990; Sedgwick, 1990).

By constantly challenging the naturalization of human created categories, queer theory allows this dissertation a better chance placing the epistemological contributions of the youth in the study on the same level as the epistemological assumptions inherent in the methodological tools of the survey itself. To intentionally “place research techniques and methods, and the underlying epistemologies and ontologies that guide them, into conversation” (Browne & Nash, 2010:11) problematizes the parts of the research process that are taken for granted.

The push of queer theory to resist categories encourages researchers to be reflexive and continuously challenge the epistemological origins of the information used and consider how it

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<sup>93</sup>Rather than allowing the inference that the replication is a testament to the inherent worth of the prior tool.

will necessarily change (Browne, 2008; Foucault, 1988; Power, 2011; Valocchi, 2005). This forces research shaped by queer theory to employ a holistic interpretation of the world with categories continuously affected by context (Nichols, 2020; Sullivan, 2003; Valocchi, 2005). Valuing "heterogeneity, variety, multiplicity and change in opposition to the prevailing order" (Nichols, 2020, p. 3). Or to reference its roots in Foucault's work, queer theory keeps the historical nature of the current conceptions of research on the surface of the project, necessitating a close attention on the influences on the work at any given time.

Queer theory contributed to the development of this dissertation by prompting a relatively open theoretical and definitional framework. The concepts and definitions used in the work are intentionally drawn broadly, and the different and unreliable uses of the same throughout the literature are emphasized. By placing only broad strokes of the concepts of something as personal as identity (e.g., race, gender, sexuality) queer theory also serves the purposes of feminist theory by keeping epistemological avenues open for reflexive feedback and revision throughout.

Queer theory will inform analysis hand in hand with intersectionality theory by preventing definitive or sweeping claims based on the results of the prospective survey. Queer theory is inherently in opposition to the underlying tenets of quantitative work, where positivism, statistically significant certainties and artificial mathematical standards hold sway (Ziliak, 2008) even as they are problematized from within their own ranks (Gliner et al., 2002). Significance testing on its own is too discrete, solid, and relied upon; by the nature of how it is used and seen, it contributes to the artificial standards and categories which research

institutions create and then treat as discovered. It is a performance of legitimacy, and queer theory pulls back the curtain on the performance to make the actors clear (Sullivan, 2003).

Quantitative research methods no more artificial than any other useful tool in research, provided researchers are careful to interpret results within the practical limits of what the data represents.<sup>94</sup> Queer theory helps in that goal by prompting transparency about the role of researchers in creating and guiding quantitative tools, so as to change or disrupt the process (Lovaas et al., 2006; Namaste, 2000b). Quantitative methods have been entrenched across multiple research disciplines for years. This long history of use can disguise the fact that these methods are still as artificial and imperfect as any other.<sup>95</sup> Neglecting salient criticisms of a method ultimately weakens results. When faults and limitations are openly addressed, they can be balanced within the study and ensure appropriate use of results in the context of methodological limitations.<sup>96</sup>

### **Criticisms, Limitations, and Connections**

Queer theory is criticized for not adhering to a strict definition or methodology, typically paired with the complaint that to effectively challenge or criticize something it must commit to a definition (Bernini, 2021). Queer theorists are concerned in deconstructing epistemologies of dichotomy by demanding broader categories and gentler boundaries (Bernini, 2021), and less concerned with constructing their own boundaries to be imposed in lieu.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup>Avoiding any attempt at appearing completely objective, for example.

<sup>95</sup>This may seem clear enough that it does not need elucidation. But it is common for researchers to consider well-established methods natural and beyond critique (Code, 1991), or the only valid epistemology. By challenging this view, queer theory resituates quantitative methods as one among many, with the understanding that each method can provide valid and useful contributions.

<sup>96</sup>For discussion of the difficulties of challenging quantitative methods, see García-Pérez (2017).

<sup>97</sup>In this way, it is sometimes easier to describe what it critiques than what it presents as a specific self-definition.

Responses to critics on this score include the idea that to impose strict definition or protocols for methodology would inscribe boundaries around the potential of queer theory and its' use (Browne & Nash, 2010). "Queer theory...is a theory always in the making, gesturing toward its own future emergence" (Escudero-Alías, 2022, p. 259). A rigorous discussion of the history and reasoning behind queer theory is given above to help demonstrate why a more rigid definition would be at odds with the nature of queer theory.<sup>98</sup> This is in line with the contention by some scholars that like feminist theory, queer theory might be more accurately described as plural 'queer theories' (Kruger & Richter, 2018). The advantage of this is that queer theory brings to this project sociocultural historical criticism as well as queer phenomenology. To offset the concern of queer theory being too vaguely defined, there is particular attention to locating queer theory as used here within the authors and ideas cited.<sup>99</sup>

Queer theory has been criticized for being overly focused on literary texts and theoretical applications rather than the institutional and material aspects of discourse (Valocchi, 2005). Some scholars have pointed to the very real problems of health, discrimination and mistreatment affecting the 2SLGBTQIA+ community (Seidman, 1995) as a more site of attention. In terms of this dissertation, the use of queer theory itself answers for this criticism. This is not a solely theoretical work, and queer theory is not used to deconstruct categories and expectations only. It is used to examine in practical terms how those categories, hierarchies and manipulative binaries contribute to very real harm for trans students. However, another answer to this criticism is in where this dissertation will be used. To allow it the chance

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<sup>98</sup>A more rigid definition might be difficult to create, given how the use of queer theory can differ across disciplines.

<sup>99</sup>This also allows for criticism in their use.

to make an impact outside of discourse, it will be disseminated wherever possible to educators and advocates who can use it. Using queer theory to create something practical.

Finally, queer theory has been criticized for its “critical deconstruction of identity or group empowerment categories” (Valocchi, 2005, p. 751). This criticism is based partly in the idea this could render useless group definitions which help to identify areas of need.<sup>100</sup> Here queer theory is balanced by the inclusion of intersectionality theory. These theories make use of and examine the categories of identity. Queer theory highlights the artificial nature of the axes, serving as a reminder that they are designed and created rather than a holistic part of an existing whole. Challenging the categories does not mean they will not be used to describe the trans students<sup>101</sup> who need assistance, by way of other possible identities. But it does mean the nature and creation of those identity categories are critically examined, viewed as artificial, and considered in context.<sup>102</sup>

### **Specific Tensions Between Standpoint Feminism and Queer Theory**

There are ontological and epistemological tensions between standpoint feminism and queer theory, particularly regarding shared identity and perspective vs. breaking down categories used to conceptualize shared identities. These do not make use of the two theories incompatible, but they must be addressed and reconciled for their use in this dissertation.

Feminist standpoint theory asks us to look at how gender should be a central concept in research (Krane, 2001). How does society construct womanhood, what is the result, and what

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<sup>100</sup>Which are also used to justify the allocations of assistance and institutional attention.

<sup>101</sup>The previously described use of the expression 'trans' to cover a loosely defined group of students is an example of how this dissertation approaches using definitions while acknowledging their limitations and origins.

<sup>102</sup>Categories and definitions may be used out of convenience as a discursive tool for conceptualizing broadly similar experiences. Queer theory provides the constant reminder to view these categories as what they are and refrain from naturalizing them.

can we learn specifically from the experiences of women (Harding, 1989; Longino, 1993)?

Standpoint theory is based in the assumption that knowledge is dependent on social context (Harding, 1991).

Spelman (1988) notes it would simplify feminism to focus on a universal womanhood, but seeking for a universal woman is both impractical and promotes an exclusionist definition of womanhood that centres merely the more common or privileged identities. Standpoint theory follows this with the consideration that women who are part of an oppressed group will have to understand the perspective of the oppressor and the oppressed (Dewar, 1993). Women as a group are an example of this. Living their lives in accordance with the systematic sex divisions imposed by men, women must be conscious of men's perspectives as well as their own as the former affects the latter (Cole, 1991). Queer people must know about heterosexuality because it profoundly affects their lives, while heterosexuals have no similar impetus to learn about queerness (Harding, 1991). Those who must know about the actions and motivations of their oppressors will have a more complete picture of the world in most cases.

Major theorists such as Collins (2000) and (hooks, 1989) who have shaped standpoint feminism have focused on Black feminist standpoint, a focus which suggests a multitude of similar confluences of identity each with their own valued perspective. This views circumstances as widely differing across identities, but with shared experiences between people in similar social context (Kenny & Kinsella, 1997).

Queer theory has a different epistemological perspective, concerned with "unmaking and undoing the subject" (McCann, 2016, p 232). Standpoint feminism asks, 'what is the view from here, and why does that matter?' while queer theory aims to unravel the sociocultural

forces which created that vantage point (Butler, 1993; McCann, 2016; Sullivan, 2003). Sexuality is at the centre of queer theory, the lens used to examine other aspects of society and culture (Edgar & Sedgwick, 1999). Ultimately queer theory prefers not to use the socially constructed categories, and to examine instead the process, the rationale, and the benefits of the construction of such categories (Krane, 2001).

Queer theory emphasises the fluid nature of identity, with sexuality and gender as intertwined and invaluable examples of how culture has shaped myriad acceptable/unacceptable iterations of each (Butler, 1990). The multiplicity of human identities is in part a proof of this fluidity (McCann, 2016), and a lesson in individuality defying broad categorization (Sullivan, 2003).

While standpoint feminism's reliance on shared identity experience may seem inherently at odds with queer theory's interrogation of the existence of categories of identity, there is overlap. Standpoint feminism and queer theory both see identity as a product of society and culture (Kenny & Kinsella, 1997). A focus on multiple vantage points ('standpoints') through which to view society is also consistent with queer theory's emphasis the original undifferentiated fluidity of human nature which holds endless variation (Sullivan, 2003).

In this dissertation, standpoint feminism and queer theory are used in tandem to explain and explore different sides of transgender students' experience. Standpoint feminism positions the important question as 'what does the world look like from trans students' viewpoint?' followed by 'how can we use that to understand both their situation and their oppressors?'.

The use of the data is limited to the categories provided (e.g., an overarching 'trans' identity) for reasons previously discussed. It does not follow that their use requires an investment in their legitimacy and static nature of this categorization. This is handled in this dissertation by in-depth discussion of terms, their use and reasoning, as well as an emphasis throughout on critically receiving these terms considering the limited information they truly convey. This is addressed as well using intersectionality theory to push for an understanding of the dataset and trans students as complex beyond the categories of convenience needed to describe them relative to other students.

Queer theory brings the question of how and why these students are constructed as separate from the oppressive gender class (cisgender people) in society. Followed by the question 'how might this rationale change if the paradigm of sexuality and gender in how we view students was shifted?'<sup>103</sup> Queer theory provides insight into the creation of these terms and definitions for selfhood, and their necessity and use. The number of students who identify themselves with the gender diverse terms offered may, for example, reflect the contemporary context.<sup>104</sup> How do they perform gender and/or sexuality and how is it seen as part their selfhood by the people around them (for example, parents, other students, teachers and so on). Asking 'how is this group constructed,' 'why,' and other questions can help inform how the group is treated in discourse and as a site of proposed solutions for mistreatment.

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<sup>103</sup>In contrast to making changes intended to affect the group as it is already constructed.

<sup>104</sup> If we examine how and why students identify themselves as trans in the First and Second School Climate Surveys, for example. The proportion of trans students shifts with their potential understanding of themselves, and the terms offered to describe themselves. The true proportion of students who identify strictly cisgender might depend on definitions of cisgender, gender diversity, both, and/or the idea that these categories are immutable and discrete.

The conclusion for the purposes of this dissertation is that there are enough complementary elements to use standpoint feminism and queer theory together while being conscious of points of contention.

### **Theory: Summary**

These theories collectively have shaped how methods of data collection are discussed and presented below, and the process of conclusion and analysis.

The methods are presented with as much detail and transparency as possible, to allow the reader to draw their own conclusions parallel to those presented in this dissertation. The methods are also presented in-depth to ensure that the tools of data collection are distinguished as the medium by which the concepts of such outcomes as well-being are defined (the epistemological process).

## Chapter 4: Methods

### Data Collection

#### *First National School Climate Survey on Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia*

Between December 2007 and June 2009, researchers from the University of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg (in partnership with Egale Canada Human Rights Trust) recruited youth across Canada to complete a primarily online survey (paper-based surveys were provided if schools requested it) on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia. Ethics approval was obtained from the University of Winnipeg and the University of Manitoba.

Participants were recruited through public advertisements<sup>105</sup> designed to reach LGBTQ [sic] youth and in-school sessions offered throughout twenty randomly selected Canadian school districts.<sup>106</sup> The result of this second method was samples from fifteen school districts, with additional data from Québec. These samples were combined with the open access data, which was also used to validate the school district datasets.

#### *Second National School Climate Survey on Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia*

Between April 2019 and May 2020, researchers from the University of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg (in partnership with Egale Canada Human Rights Trust) conducted the Second National School Climate Survey, which replicated and extended the work of the first survey. The team recruited secondary school aged youth to complete the online survey in multiple ways: direct recruitment via youth organizations for Canadian 2SLGBTQIA+ people; advertisements through social media outlets (e.g., Facebook, Instagram); and through Canadian

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<sup>105</sup>Advertising the open-access survey on news releases, website postings, social media such as Facebook, and direct contact with youth-oriented 2SLGBTQIA+ organizations across Canada.

<sup>106</sup>Apart from Québec, where a team of local researchers ran a parallel survey.

school boards/districts who agreed to distribute the survey link to the populations under their purview. The latter method was aided in some provinces by encouragement or endorsement from the provincial Ministry of Education.

Ethics approval was obtained from both the University of Winnipeg and the University of Manitoba for the survey, which required about 20-25 minutes. While I was not directly involved in the Second Climate Survey data collection, I administered a similar survey with Egale Canada between 2019 and 2020 (Egale Canada, 2022) which was modelled on the structure of the Climate Survey. As research lead on this survey ('Speak OUT: LGBTQI2S Dating Violence') I also conducted analysis and gained considerable familiarity with the survey format and resulting dataset. I joined the work of the Second School Climate Survey during analysis conducted for several papers, which allowed me experience with the dataset and broad results before conducting my dissertation analyses.

This dissertation is crafted with the feminist goal of defining and treating youth as individuals worthy of respect, and cognizant of solutions for issues they face (e.g., calling on a teacher) as well as the risks and drawbacks associated with such actions. Though the author was not involved in the creation of the survey, the methodological approaches used the First and Second School Climate Surveys<sup>107</sup> align with the goals of feminist theory as defined in this dissertation. The First and Second School Climate Surveys include open-ended options throughout to facilitate youth sharing responses the researchers may not have anticipated. In

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<sup>107</sup>Specifically, as undertaken to access knowledge held by a socially subordinate group.

all the questions, youth are assumed to have valid reasons for the choices they make even when those choices are not consistent with the expectations of adults around them.<sup>108</sup>

The research questions intentionally do not frame trans youth as ‘vulnerable’ or as passive objects in need of protection and special resources. Intentionally or unintentionally, this language can position trans youth as a group in need of rescue, rather than a group of people who are actively denied the resources and protections provided freely to cisgender youth. The wording of survey questions allows for the autonomy and reasoning of youth to be captured to some degree as well. For example, questions about whether youth have reported harassment (“Did you report the incident(s) to a teacher, the principal/vice-principal, or other school staff?”) are followed by detailed questions about why they have not reported it which include answers which position adults as culpable (“Because school staff were part of the harassment”). Further questions ask about whether adults around them were ineffective, or how they reacted (“When you reported the incident(s) of physical harassment/assault, what was the reaction from school staff?”) without assuming the adult staff around youth reacted appropriately or were able to correct the issue if asked.

While these may seem to be minor points or simply more detailed inquiries, the deeper importance of these expanded questions is in positioning youth as the best authorities of their

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<sup>108</sup>For example, adults may expect youth should rely on reporting homophobic bullying to adults with certainty that this would resolve the issue, and youth may have their own experiences which contradict the presumed usefulness of this approach.

own experiences.<sup>109</sup> This includes their holding unique knowledge which adults do not possess (and/or may not anticipate measuring).<sup>110</sup>

Questions do not presume the goodwill and integrity of authority figures (e.g., educators and administrators) simply because they are adults, as individuals have various motivations and attitudes. Though ostensibly there to protect youth, the approach taken here is not to presume that all these authority figures are performing their role effectively or in good faith, and youth may know more about that than the people in charge due to their vantage point.<sup>111</sup> The interpretation of results aims to fulfill the obligations to feminist theory to centre youth as the authority on their experiences by assuming they have the capacity to make accurate judgements about this in their surroundings, and identify those in authority who might cause them harm.

This dissertation also aims to avoid the presumption that adults (including researchers) are aware of all the experiences of the youth. There will still be unanticipated or unreported problems that youth face, which are not captured by the scope of the surveys. There may be factors in their environment which adults, including researchers, know nothing about (Oswell, 2012). The First and Second School Climate Surveys balance the obligation to provide an avenue for youth to be heard in research against the need to ensure the survey was not onerous or

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<sup>109</sup>The same credence which is given to adult contributors to research which is shaped by feminist theory (Hesse-Biber, 2012a).

<sup>110</sup>This wording can serve a secondary purpose in reminding the researchers conducting analysis that each step of the experience of navigating harassment and official solutions cannot be assumed to work in the way that those who create and enforce the systems (e.g., school officials) and rely on them (e.g., parents) believe them to.

<sup>111</sup>See further readings to explore standpoint feminism (Harding, 1993; hooks, 2000a, 2000b; Kenny & Kinsella, 1997; Krane, 2001; Longino, 1993).

overwhelming to complete (which could discourage participation, and/or result in attrition in later sections).

### **Dataset Characteristics**

Both the First and Second School Climate surveys solicited responses from 2SLGBTQIA+ youth as well as cisgender heterosexual (CH) youth. The resulting data provides measures of the experiences of trans youth as well as the attitudes of their LGBTQ+ identity and CH peers towards them. This provides scope for comparison, as well as valuable environmental context regarding the treatment of trans youth.

#### **First School Climate Survey**

The First School Climate Survey (Taylor & Peter, 2011a) yielded a large, robust dataset ( $N = 3,607$ ) with contributions from youth in secondary schools across Canada (except Québec). The mean age of participants was 17.4 years ( $SD = 4.23$ ). Most (71%) identified as straight/ heterosexual, followed by a quarter (26%) identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or questioning. Three percent identified themselves as trans or Two Spirit.

Proportions differed significantly across the different recruitment methods. In the open access survey, the majority (73%) of youth identified themselves as part of the LGBTQ [sic] community (compared to only 14% in the in-school sessions), suggesting LGBTQ identity motivated open recruitment participation.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup>These proportions are drawn from the full dataset (including both trans students and cisgender students). Proportions reported in results and analysis reflect trans students unless otherwise indicated.

## Second School Climate Survey

The Second School Climate Survey (Peter et al., 2021) yielded a large, robust dataset ( $N = 3,558$ ) with contributions from youth across Canada. Students who completed the survey had a mean age of 15.9 years ( $SD = 1.50$ ). Almost two-thirds (62%) of the sample identified as heterosexual, while smaller proportions selected bisexual (16%); lesbian (10%) queer or questioning (8% each) or other minoritized sexualities (see results for full proportions). Less than one percent identified themselves as Two Spirit, or asexual. Sexual identity categories include some overlap, as fourteen percent of students who contributed to their survey chose more than one sexual identity to describe themselves.

More than half the students (57%) identified themselves as a woman/girl, followed by roughly a third who chose man/boy (36%), and six percent who selected non-binary [sic], with smaller proportions indicating more specific minoritized gender identities.<sup>113</sup> Seven percent of students selected more than one gender identity.

### Measures

Variables used in the dissertation analyses are drawn from both the First and Second School Climate Surveys. Variables are drawn from those measured in both surveys wherever possible, to allow comparison. This provides insight into the experiences of trans students compared to their peers, and all students' perceptions of the homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in their day-to-day school environment.

All analyses include comparisons between trans students, LGBTQ+ students, and cisgender heterosexual students. Overlap between the first two groups is dealt with as follows.

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<sup>113</sup>See results section for specific proportions.

Trans students may also have a LGBTQ+ identity.<sup>114</sup> Preference is given to trans identity in grouping, due to that identity forming the group of interest in this dissertation. Where students' identities overlap between trans and LGBTQ+ identities, they are placed in the trans group. Trans students are first discussed in the context of their trans identities in analysis (with overlap addressed where needed) then compared with LGBTQ+ students and CH students.

Variables used in this dissertation, including measures, coding for analysis (e.g., indicator coding) and notes on index construction are discussed in the following sections. Some variables are not used in mean comparisons but provide context for the research questions. Descriptive statistics for these variables are reported in the first section of analysis.

Variables used in the mean comparisons are marked as grouping variables, outcome variables or covariates. Variables were chosen based on their relationship to grouping variables (minoritized gender, minoritized sexuality, or neither), demonstrated in the literature review, and whether each met the statistical assumptions required for inclusion in parametric (or non-parametric, where necessary) mean comparison testing. Frequencies and means are reported in results for the trans students. Where possible variables are compared between the First and Second School Climate Surveys.

## **Grouping Variables**

### **Trans Students**

Students were grouped as trans if they selected one or more gender identities outside of exclusively cisgender binary categories.<sup>115</sup> Students were asked to select as many gender

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<sup>114</sup>For example, a transgender girl who is bisexual.

<sup>115</sup>Cisgender is defined as either selecting only 'boy/man' or only 'girl/woman' or selecting either of these options as well as the option 'cisgender.'

terms as they felt applied to them. To clarify any terms which might be unfamiliar, a hyperlink to a glossary of terms was provided which gave definitions for the identities listed.

Students were presented with the options: Woman/girl, Man/boy, Transfeminine, Transmasculine, Trans, Non-binary [sic], Two Spirit, Genderfluid, Genderqueer, and Agender. A further option allowed students to contribute an identity not included in the list: “Another gender (specify).” Students were also invited to use this option if they identified with one of the identities on the list but did not define it in the same way it was defined in the Egale Canada glossary. Where multiple gender identities were selected, the selection of any trans identity automatically placed the student in the trans group.<sup>116</sup>

### **LGBQ+ Students**

Students were grouped as LGBQ+ if they selected one or more sexualities outside of exclusively heterosexual (“Heterosexual/straight”). Students were asked to select as many options for sexuality as they felt applied to them. To clarify any terms which might be unfamiliar, a hyperlink to a glossary of terms was provided which gave definitions for the identities listed. A student who selected both a trans identity and an LGBQ+ identity would be grouped with trans students.

### **Cisgender Heterosexual Students**

Cisgender heterosexual students are grouped by the indication of both a binary gender only (e.g., either boy/man, or girl/woman) and a heterosexual orientation, to the exclusion of all other gender identities and sexualities.

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<sup>116</sup>For example, if a student selected both ‘Woman/girl’ and ‘Genderqueer’ they would be placed in the minoritized gender group.

## Racialization

Ethnicity was measured with the question “What is your race / ethnicity? (Check all that apply)”. Students might have a racial identity which is divorced from the ethnic context usually common to it. However, there are two reasons to use this measure for race and ethnicity. The first is that race and ethnicity are often conflated in common parlance.<sup>117</sup> Students’ experiences and/or understanding of their race and ethnicity are unlikely to be parsed separately, especially as it cannot be assumed they have been taught to view them separately (and might conversely have been taught to view them as one). Secondly, the survey measures race and ethnicity as one concept to avoid adding complexity and confusion to a survey which is already by necessity nuanced in many measures.

This question asked students to select all the identities which they felt applied to them.<sup>118</sup> In the initial results, the full span of options represented in the sample are provided. However, for the purposes of comparative analyses, this variable had to be simplified. While it would have been possible to indicator-code each race/ethnicity this would have created a prohibitively large number of variables for inclusion as covariates. To allow for a range of other covariates in the comparison still examining the effect of race/ethnicity, the options for race/ethnicity were simplified to a binary variable of racialized and non-racialized identity.<sup>119</sup>

This variable was constructed in reference to the Canadian context. Within Canada, White people are not subject to racialization in the social context as their appearance is

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<sup>117</sup>In a way not necessarily incorrect, as there are general group commonalities and the differences or discrimination resulting from each are usually inseparable.

<sup>118</sup>E.g., a biracial/multiethnic student could select both White and South Asian.

<sup>119</sup>Reflecting a plural group of respectively minoritized racial/ethnic groups, and a majoritized racial/ethnic group of those who selected only 'White' as their identity.

normalized, considered representative of the mainstream or 'default' identity. The simplified race variable included in the comparative analyses where appropriate is divided between White as the only selected identity, and any response where the student selected one or more other racial/ethnic groups (e.g., Indigenous, Black African). In this division, people who selected options which suggest a biracial/multiethnic identity would be grouped as racialized, with no overlap. As with the other discrete groups, analysis of this variable began with cross tabulating the simplified variable and the various options to ensure accuracy in the division. No overlap or issues were found in the variable.

### **Demographics, Context and Covariates**

Broad demographics as well as contextual variables provide insight into the environment and experiences of Canadian schools (particularly on 2SLGBTQIA+ representation, treatment, and support) and did not meet the criteria to be included as covariates in the comparative analyses (Analysis of covariance, or ANCOVA). While some statistics for trans youth have been included in the reports for the First and Second School Climate Surveys, an in-depth overview of this group specifically is not currently reported elsewhere.

A covariate has a theoretical relationship to the outcome variable, a linear relationship roughly parallel across all the comparison groups. Appropriate covariates cannot have a significant relationship with each other and cannot be the direct effect of the grouping variable (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

As the data from the School Climate Surveys richly represents the experiences of 2SLGBTQIA+ students and the larger student body, there are several reasons why variables

proposed as covariates, and theoretically related to the other variables of interest, would upon examination for appropriateness be deemed inappropriate for inclusion in these analyses.

In practical terms, including variables as covariates which had few responses would result in significant attrition (reduction of the usable cases within the dataset) which could reduce the sample size to less usable proportions. Students who contributed to the survey had the option to skip any question other than the consent to participate. The analyses for this dissertation use listwise deletion, which means that a missing answer on any of the variables included in the analysis would result in the entire response of that student being excluded. Every additional variable used in analysis (e.g., covariates) increases the proportion of students who can be excluded due to a missing answer.

In addition, to meet the criteria for inclusion in ANCOVA (and similar non-parametric analyses) covariates must have a significant linear relationship to the outcome variables (to which they are theoretically related) to justify their inclusion. If multiple variables show a strong relationship to outcome variables, excluding one as a covariate may reflect a weaker relationship than other variables. In addition, if two covariates are highly correlated, one must be removed from the analyses to avoid increasing the degrees of freedom unnecessarily (multicollinearity; redundant contribution to apportioning variance).

Overall, inclusion of covariates is a careful assessment with decisions weighed by how much a proposed covariate will add to the proposed analyses if it meets the assumptions of the statistical test in question. Inclusion of a covariate is intended to make visible in the analysis an influence which could affect the outcome variables (demonstrated by its' parallel linear relationship to the outcome variables in the groups examined). This inclusion ensures that the

effect of the covariate is not erroneously attributed to unassigned variance<sup>120</sup> or to the grouping variable (which is the effect we are interested in). Put simply, including appropriate covariates makes statistical tests more sensitive and accurate.

### **Analytical Procedures**

#### **Analysis of Covariance**

Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) is used to compare the means of each group on the outcome variables listed above, while holding constant the covariates (to partition off the variance accounted for by each). In lay language this means that to compare the means of each group based on gender and sexuality, while the effect of other variables which have a relationship with the outcome (covariates) are accounted for so their effect would not be confused for that of the group differences.

Due to variation within the subscales for well-being during preliminary analyses, the scales for psychological, emotional, and social well-being are examined individually. In lay language, this means that the overall direction of scores (for example, high or low scores) on these sub-scales were different across the groups. Examining well-being scores from the combined scales as intended would potentially misrepresent the data by obscuring differential patterns across the three types of well-being measured.

#### *Usefulness of Covariates*

A strong relationship between the covariates and the outcome variable can help to minimize error variance and allow for a clearer picture of why outcome variables differ on the grouping variable due to those groups specifically rather than other factors (Tabachnick &

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<sup>120</sup>Referred to as the 'error term;' there is always some proportion of variance which is unexplained.

Fidell, 2007). This is the value added to an analysis of variance (ANOVA) by the inclusion of covariates; to increase the sensitivity of the comparison on the grouping variable by reducing the error term. Adding covariates to an analysis is intended to remove the variation in the outcome variable which is due to that covariate. This is balanced against the increased degrees of freedom caused by adding any variables to the model.

### *Degrees of Freedom*

Degrees of freedom are the number of values free to vary when the other parameters are known. There is a small increase in the amount of unknown information within the overall test whenever a variable (covariate, in this case) is added. If the variable adds value to the test outcome by providing a more complete picture of the variables of interest, then it is worthwhile to accept an increase in the degrees of freedom (the unknown content of the overall test).

ANCOVA is best suited for the inclusion of a relatively limited number of covariates, before reaching a point of diminishing returns in the advantages they convey (as offset by the increase to the degrees of freedom used; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). For this reason, many variables were proposed as covariates (and examined for their appropriateness) but only a select few were finally included in comparative analyses. The remaining variables hold rich contextual and illustrative value on the issues examined in analyses; measures for these variables are related below.

### *Data Transformation*

The data was converted (transformed) from raw scores to standardized log scores (using a base log of 10) to allow for the appropriate use of ANCOVA by de-emphasizing outliers and counteracting skew (see Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007 for background on data transformation

practices). In lay language, log scores are created by taking the mathematical logarithm of each score. That is, the number it would need to be raised to (the exponent) to result in a specific number; in this case, 10. Because the smallest value on each variable was 0, a constant of 1 was added to each score. This does not affect the values (which are being examined in relationship to each other), but allows the full scale to be used, as there is no defined log value for zero. Standardization transforms each score to a standard representation of its' distance from the mean (also called a z-score), which allows for easier and more consistent discussion of outcome variables without the need to reiterate differing scale measures.

The standardized log scores for each variable were examined using a bootstrapped ANCOVA. Bootstrapping is a data amplification technique which repeatedly resamples the existing dataset to create a larger analog of the population, an estimate of the population as seen from this set of scores. In layman's terms, bootstrapping extrapolates the dataset to create a picture of what the population would look like if the dataset is assumed to be representative of it. In this case, 5000 bootstrap samples were generated for each of the ANCOVAs from a robust, reasonably representative sample of youth across Canadian schools.

### **Logistic Regression**

The categorical, binary safety outcome variable (feeling unsafe at school) was examined using logistic regression, a test which examines the relationship between a categorical or continuous predictor variable and a dichotomous outcome. In this case, logistic regression is used to examine the odds of each of the comparison groups (trans youth, cisgender LGBTQ+ youth, and cisgender heterosexual youth) giving a 'yes' or 'no' answer to the question of whether they feel safe at school.

Categorical predictors must be indicator coded to allow their use in a logistic regression analysis. Indicator codes are artificial variables which represent one group within a categorical variable as '1,' and all other groups for that variable as '0.' For example, an indicator code for trans identity represents the presence or absence of a trans identity, by coding trans youth as scores of '1,' and cisgender LGBTQ youth, as well as cisgender heterosexual youth, as '0'. Categorical variables are converted into  $N - 1$  indicator coded variables, where  $N$  is the number of categories of the original variable. The final category serves as the reference group, and the odds ratios generated by logistic regression represent the odds of the indicator coded groups (for example, trans identities) having the specified outcome (feeling unsafe at school) compared to the reference group.

In this case, because the examines whether trans youth have the same safety and support as their cisgender peers, the reference group is the group expected to have (out of the comparison groups) the most support and safety, due to having several majoritized identities. Youth who were assigned male at birth and identified as boys, who also identify as heterosexual, live in a society which reflects their experience and is meant to meet the needs of people with their identities (as well as presenting options and independence for people of their binary gender which are not dependent on the other).

The odds of trans youth (MG) and cisgender LGBTQ+ youth (of both binary genders; CB-LGBTQ+ and CG-LGBTQ+) respectively feeling unsafe at school are likely lower based on the literature reviewed compared to cisgender heterosexual youth, both boys (CB-HET) and girls (CG-HET). This does not mean cisgender youth are perfectly supported and need no help; however, as trans youth and cisgender LGBTQ+ youth typically have experienced less safety,

security, and well-being than this group in their schools, the experiences of cisgender heterosexual students represent an average outcome which at minimum other students should be able to experience. The division of binary genders for cisgender youth are included to account for any differences between these groups based on the differential socialization and treatment of (cisgender) boys and girls. There are not enough binary trans youth (e.g., transgender boys) to allow for these groups to be included separately in the comparison.

### **Context**

#### **2SLGBTQIA+ Expression and Interests (SCS2 only)**

Students were asked whether they or another student had been prevented from engaging in a range of behaviours expressing a trans or LGBTQ+ identity, or whether they (or another student) had been disciplined for the action. The list of behaviours for this question also included open expressions of interest in 2SLGBTQIA+ topics, or gender nonconformity.<sup>121</sup>

Affirmative response options included “Yes, I have [been prevented],” and “Yes, another student has.” Dissertation analyses also include an additive variable for each, with a score for each respondent which was the numerical sum of how many individual behaviours they (or another student) had been prevented from expressing. Finally, there are three combined variables created for analysis, each measuring dichotomously the presence or absence of any incident (one or more) of 2SLGBTQIA+ expression being prevented or disciplined.<sup>122</sup> These variables provide a broad picture of how much the prevention of expression impinges on students’ school environment.

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<sup>121</sup>E.g., “Prevented from wearing clothes of a particular gender.”

<sup>122</sup>In the student themselves, in another student, or both/either.

### **Anti-2SLGBTQIA+ Language Present**

In both School Climate Surveys, students were asked if they had heard various forms of derogatory language in their school. In the First School Climate Survey homophobic language was measured with two questions<sup>123</sup> while a broader list of gender-related language was provided as well.<sup>124</sup> All of these statements were rated on a four-point Likert scale (1 “Frequently (daily)” to 4 “Never”). Frequencies and descriptives are reported in analysis, and an aggregate mean score.

In the Second Survey, students were asked to rate a longer list of specific anti-2SLGBTQIA+ expressions<sup>125</sup> within the last year of school. Each expression was and a five-point Likert scale (1 “Frequently (daily)” to 5 “Never”). These scores for this latter measure were combined as an overall index representing anti-2SLGBTQIA+ language. The mean of this aggregate index is included in comparative analyses to examine whether hearing anti-2SLGBTQIA+ expressions can affect ratings of school safety, belonging, and well-being (sub-indices) across the grouping variables. Results for this variable include factor analysis, for measures of internal consistency as well as confirming underlying factor(s).

### **Reactions to Anti-2SLGBTQIA+ Language**

Subsequent questions also asked whether teachers or other students intervened if they were present when these expressions were used (1 “Always” to 4 “Never”).<sup>126</sup> In the first

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<sup>123</sup>“Do you hear the expression “That’s so Gay!” in school?” and “Have you heard other remarks such as “faggot”, “queer”, “lezbo”, “dyke”, etc. used in a negative manner at school?”

<sup>124</sup>E.g., “Have you heard comments about boys not acting “masculine” enough?”

<sup>125</sup>E.g., “no homo.”

<sup>126</sup>In analysis, the scale for this variable is inverted so higher scores reflect more frequent interventions (from peers or teachers respectively).

survey, these questions were preceded by more general measures asking if teachers were around when homophobic comments were made,<sup>127</sup> scored on the same four-point scale.

Finally, students in both surveys were asked if hearing homophobic language distressed them.<sup>128</sup> Both questions were scored on a four-point Likert scale, but with different options.<sup>129</sup> The former was inverted in analysis, so greater scores corresponded to greater distress, consistent with the direction of the scale in the Second Survey.

### **School Areas and Safety**

Students selected specific school areas (e.g., classrooms, cafeteria) which they felt were “unsafe for LGBTQ\* students (or those perceived to be) or those with LGBTQ\* family members?” Students could select multiple options. School area safety also serves as a proxy for other potential problems.<sup>130</sup> The school area safety measure shows whether trans and/or LGBTQ+ students (or even those who have a connection to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, e.g., a parent who is gay) have fewer safe spaces than peers.

### **Disclosing Verbal Harassment or Physical Assault (SCS1 only)**

Students were asked (yes/no) if they had told school staff about assault or harassment. A second question asked if they had told a parent or guardian. These questions measure disclosure of verbal harassment and assault together, while the Second Survey (below) measured verbal and physical harassment separately.

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<sup>127</sup>“When you have heard these remarks, has a teacher or other school staff member been present?”

<sup>128</sup>With the question “How much does it bother or upset you when you hear homophobic comments like the ones in the previous question?” in the First Survey, and “How much does it bother or distress you to hear “gay” used in a derogatory/negative way?” in the Second Survey.

<sup>129</sup>The options in the First Survey ranged from “Extremely upsetting” (1) to “Does not bother me at all” (4), while the options in the Second Survey ranged from “Not at all” (1) to “A great deal” (4).

<sup>130</sup>For example, feeling unsafe in specific areas like the cafeteria or bathroom could cause physical discomfort (e.g., hunger) and negatively impact health.

### **Verbal Harassment (SCS2 only)**

In the Second School Climate Survey, students were asked if they had been "verbally harassed (called names, intimidated, threatened)" due to a range of reasons, including gender and perceived gender.

### **Reporting Verbal Harassment to School Staff (SCS2 only)**

The Second School Climate Survey explored why students who faced verbal harassment had not "report[ed] the incident(s) of verbal harassment to a teacher, principal/vice principal or other school staff person."<sup>131</sup>

### **Physical Harassment Experiences**

In the First and Second School Climate Surveys, students were asked "In the past year, have you been physically harassed or assaulted (shoved, pushed, punched, kicked, or injured) at your school because of...[identity]."<sup>132</sup> Students rated frequency using a four-point Likert scale (1 "Frequently (daily)" to 4 "Never").

### **Reporting Physical Harassment to School Staff (SCS2 only)**

Reasons students did not report physical harassment to school staff, and experiences of reporting, were measured with the same options as verbal harassment.

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<sup>131</sup>Options ranged from concerns of embarrassment to issues of safety (if reporting prompted retaliation).

<sup>132</sup>The list of reasons offered included real or perceived minoritized gender identity or sexuality, as well as race, religion, and other factors.

### **Exclusion and Sexual Harassment Experiences**

In the First School Climate Survey, students were asked (yes/no) whether they had experienced various acts of exclusion or harassment at school due to being 2SLGBTQIA+, being perceived to be 2SLGBTQIA+, or having family or friends who are 2SLGBTQIA+.<sup>133</sup>

In the Second School Climate Survey, students were asked to rate on a five-point Likert scale (1 “Frequently (daily)” to 5 “Never”) how often (if ever) they had experienced various acts of exclusion or harassment at school due to being 2SLGBTQIA+ or being perceived as 2SLGBTQIA+. A separate second question asked if students had experienced these same actions because someone in their family was part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. In analysis, the scale for this variable is inverted so higher scores reflect more frequent experiences of exclusion. Results for this variable include factor analysis, for measures of internal consistency as well as confirming underlying factor(s).

### **School Policies and Effect**

In the First Survey, students were asked whether their school had a policy or procedure in place for addressing harassment homophobia; they were also asked if their school district had such a policy in place. A following question asked students how effective they thought their teachers or school staff were in addressing homophobic harassment on a four-point Likert scale (1 “Very effective” to 4 “They refuse to address the issue”). Finally, they were asked “In general, how supportive do you think your school community is of LGBTQ people?” (scored on a five-point Likert scale from 1 ‘Very supportive’ to 5 ‘Very unsupportive’). In analysis the scales

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<sup>133</sup>For example, “In the past year, have students spread mean rumours or lies about you at school for any of these reasons: because you are or are perceived to be LGBTQ, or you have an LGBTQ family member or friend?”

for both variables are inverted, so higher scores are associated with higher teacher effectiveness or school support respectively.

In the Second Survey, students were asked if their school had a policy for addressing homophobia, or a policy for addressing transphobia. They were also asked whether they thought their school responded effectively to each type of incident (yes/no/do not know/choose not to answer).

Following questions assessed how effectively students felt teachers or other staff members addressed homophobia, transphobia and biphobia (1 “Very effective” to 4 “They refuse to address the issue”). Finally, students were asked about their school’s general impression of support for 2SLGBTQIA+ people on a five-point Likert scale (1 “Very supportive” to 4 “Very unsupportive”). In analysis, the scales for these questions are inverted so higher scores reflect a greater perception of effectiveness or support.

### **Recommendations for Teachers (SCS2 only)**

The final contextual variable included in these dissertation analyses is “What do you want your teachers to know about supporting LGBTQ\* people?” Students could select multiple responses from a list of statements.<sup>134</sup> Frequencies are reported in analysis, with specific attention to those statements which correspond with previous measures listing current supportive behaviour from school staff and teachers (e.g., 2SLGBTQIA+ visibility or curriculum). These comparisons can suggest whether a method of support is desired by students in this measure because it is currently nonexistent in their school. Or, if they are indicating a method currently practiced which may not be effective.

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<sup>134</sup>For example, “How to address gender neutral pronoun options.”

## Covariates

### **Parental Support (SCS2 only)**

Support from parents was measured by students rating their agreement with nine different statements (e.g., “my parent(s)/guardian(s) care about my feelings”) on a four-point Likert scale (1 “Strongly agree to 4 “Strongly disagree”). In analysis, the scale for this variable is inverted so higher scores reflect higher perceived parental support. For this variable, factor analysis is performed to examine internal consistency and confirming underlying factor(s).

### **Academic Self-Efficacy (SCS2 only)**

Academic self-efficacy refers to the extent that a student believes in their own ability to complete academic work. The was measured in the Second Climate Survey by having students rate their agreement with four statements about their perceived academic abilities<sup>135</sup> scored on a four-point Likert scale (1 “Not true” to 4 “Very true”). These ratings were combined into an aggregate mean score of academic self-efficacy. This measure is not present in the First Climate Survey, which precludes it from inclusion in analyses comparing the First and Second School Climate Surveys.

### **Recreation and Participation (SCS2 only)**

In the second National School Climate Survey, students were asked to rate the frequency of their participation in different forms of recreation (scored on a six-point Likert scale; 1 “Never” to 6 “Every day”). Options included after-school activities like drama or debate, as well as employment, volunteering, and other community activities.

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<sup>135</sup>For example, “I can learn the things taught in school.”

In analysis, the scale for this variable is inverted so higher scores reflect greater frequency of participation. The ratings of various activities are combined into one index of overall frequency of participation in activities, and the mean aggregate of this index is used in the comparative analyses. Descriptive statistics and frequencies of specific activities (e.g., school related, 2SLGBTQIA+ related) are related in the initial results and examined across the grouping variables.

### **Queer Visibility**

In the First School Climate Survey, students were asked three questions pertaining to the visibility of 2SLGBTQIA+ people and issues in their school. The first question asked if students had been taught about different historical events (e.g., Stonewall riots), topics, or celebrations (e.g., Pride) related to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community; either in class or at school events such as assemblies. Students gave a yes or no answer for each example. The second question on visibility and inclusion asked if there were any mention of 2SLGBTQIA+ relationships in classes which covered dating and sexuality with a dichotomous yes/no answer option. A follow up question asked students to rate if the inclusion was positive or negative (scored on a four-point Likert scale; 1 'Very positive' to 4 'Very negative').<sup>136</sup> Finally, students gave a yes or no answer to whether there were resources related to the LGBTQ [sic] community in their class materials or school library.

In the Second School Climate Survey, there were three questions which spanned forms of 2SLGBTQIA+ visibility and inclusion. The first question asked students to select (with multiple

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<sup>136</sup>In analysis, the scale for this variable is inverted so higher scores reflect more positive inclusion ratings.

responses allowed) what forms of LGBTQ\* [sic]<sup>137</sup> visibility they had seen in their school, such as books, magazines, posters, or other materials. A follow-up question asked if the student had “...ever participated in any LGBTQ\*-inclusive efforts mentioned above at your school?” (yes/no). A second question asked if students had been taught about different historical events (e.g., Stonewall riots), topics, or celebrations (e.g., Pride) related to the LGBTQ\* [sic]<sup>138</sup> community; either in class or at school events such as assemblies.<sup>139</sup>

The third question on visibility and inclusion asked if 2SLGBTQIA+ relationships were brought up in classes which covered dating and sexuality. The four affirmative answers provided ranged in a Likert-style scale from “Yes, in a very positive way” to “Yes, in a very negative way.” In analysis, the scale is inverted so higher scores reflect more positive mentions.

### **Queer Curriculum Inclusion**

In the First School Climate Survey, students were asked to select various classes (e.g., Math, Drama, English/Language Arts) if they had been taught LGBTQ topics in that class. Frequencies are reported in results, as well as an additive summary variable showing the number of classes overall in which each students said they had learned about LGBTQ topics. A further question asked if the classes which had taught these LGBTQ [sic] topics addressed them in positive or negative ways, scored on a four-point Likert scale (1 ‘Very positive’ to 4 ‘Very negative’). Scores for this variable are inverted in analysis, so that higher score on the scale correspond to more positive portrayals.

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<sup>137</sup>See Footnote 53.

<sup>138</sup>See Footnote 53.

<sup>139</sup>If they selected yes, students were further asked to select “Yes, in a positive way” or “Yes, in a negative way.”

In the Second School Climate Survey, students were asked whether “teachers have included LGBTQ content in class or curriculum” in class in a variety of ways which ranged from guest speakers, inclusive language, and mention of queer theory.<sup>140</sup> Students could select multiple options. These options were combined into an overall variable of queer inclusion in curriculum, the sum of each of the instances of queer inclusion selected. This summary variable is included in comparative analyses as a covariate, while the overall frequencies are examined more minutely in comparison between the First and Second School Climate Surveys to see if the levels of queer inclusion in curriculum have changed.

### **Disclosure of 2SLGBTQIA+ Identity**

In the First School Climate Survey, students were asked to select who they were ‘out’ to (had disclosed their identity to) if they were LGBTQ [sic] using a five-point Likert scale (1 ‘I am ‘out’ to most people at school’ to 5 ‘I am NOT out to anyone at school’). In analysis, the scale for this variable is inverted so higher scores reflect a greater degree of disclosure (being ‘out’) to the people at their school.

In the Second School Climate Survey, students were asked who in their life is aware of their gender or sexual identity with two questions covering school (similar to the inquiry in the First Survey) as well as people in their life outside of school. School related options ranged from “no one at school” to “my whole school community” with specific choices for friends, teachers, and classmates. Outside of school, the disclosure options ranged from “no one” to “generally

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<sup>140</sup>Examples given also included whether LGBTQ people, characters, themes, and history had been taught at their school either positively or negatively.

open to everyone close to me”. Cisgender heterosexual students are not included in reporting for this measure, as their majoritized identities render disclosure unnecessary.

The poles of the scale for each social area (people at school and people outside of school, respectively) were converted into new variables computed on a binary (‘indicator coded’), with a baseline score of ‘0’ and openness to any or all the people around them scored as ‘1’. This allowed examination of the relationship between high or low levels of disclosure with related continuously measured variables (in this work, Likert scales are designated appropriate measures for this) such as perceived safety, or parental support (for the Second Climate Survey dataset). These were examined with point-biserial correlation (a procedure for correlations between a dichotomous variable and a continuous variable).

### **Frequency of Anti-2SLGBTQIA+ Language**

In both the First and Second School Climate Surveys, students were asked how frequently they heard expressions discriminatory to 2SLGBTQIA+ people. In the First Survey students were asked to rate how often their peers or school staff/teachers used such language, on a four-point Likert scale (1 “Frequently (daily) to 4 “Never”). In contrast, in the Second Survey students were asked about the specific proportions of their peers (1 “None” to 4 “Most”) that used specific anti-2SLGBTQIA+ remarks (e.g., “No homo”).

### **Verbal Abuse**

Students were asked if they had “In the past year...been verbally harassed (name-calling, intimidation, threats) at your school because of [a given identity].” The identity options included real or perceived trans identity, or LGBTQ+ identity, as well as race, religion, and other

factors. In the First School Climate Survey, students simply asked (yes/no) whether they had experienced verbal abuse based on each listed identity.

However, for this question in the Second School Climate Survey, students scored the frequency of the abuse based on a given identity using a four-point Likert scale (1 “Frequently (daily)” to 4 “Never”). This scale allowed a more nuanced exploration of how students with different identities are respectively targeted for verbal abuse.

### **COVID-19 Shutdown**

There is also a major event affecting the data collection of the Second School Climate Survey; this survey collected data both before and after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>141</sup> The two samples (before and after COVID) generally showed little difference (Peter et al., 2021). Comparisons within the data collected during the COVID-19 school shutdowns showed that 2SLGBTQ [sic] students had lower positive mental health scores than their peers.<sup>142</sup> To account for this, school closure for COVID-19 is included as a control variable in analyses of the Second School Climate Survey.

### **Outcome Variables**

#### **Perceived Safety for 2SLGBTQIA+ Identities (SCS2 only)**

Students were asked to rate on a four-point Likert scale (1 “Very safe” to 4 “Not at all safe”) how safe they perceived their school to be for specific 2SLGBTQIA+ identities (e.g., a nonbinary student), gender nonconforming students (e.g., a male student who “acts feminine”)

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<sup>141</sup>More specifically for the purposes of what these surveys measure (school experience), data collection took place both before and after schools within Canada closed and moved online.

<sup>142</sup>Influenced by their level of school attachment as well as their level of parental involvement (for more information see Campbell et al., 2022).

and students with LGBTQ [sic] family members. In analysis, the scale for this variable is inverted so higher scores reflect greater perceived safety (1 “Not at all safe” to 4 “Very safe”).

Descriptives for some individual items on this scale are reported in the results section, while the aggregate mean score is used as an outcome variable for comparative analyses to examine differences based on in-group or out-group membership. Even if students who are not 2SLGBTQIA+ feel their school is safe for everyone, students who are part of that community may have a different perspective. The mean of the subset of questions on perceived safety which refer to gender is examined separately as well.

### **Feeling Unsafe at School**

Students were asked to give a yes/no answer on whether they ever felt unsafe in their school due to a marginalized identity. They were presented with a range of potential identities (e.g., “your real or perceived ethnicity”) and could select multiple answers. This provides insight into how students' safety is impacted by having multiple marginalized identities that might be targeted for harassment, or the effect of being targeted based on a perceived identity even if the perception is incorrect. In analysis, this variable is presented as a binary yes/no response for all students based on whether they said they felt unsafe at school (yes/no) due to any of the marginalized identity options.

### **School Belonging**

For this measure, students rated their agreement with ten statements<sup>143</sup> on a four-point Likert scale (1 “Strongly agree” to 4 “Strongly disagree”). These scores are combined, and the resulting aggregate mean is used as an outcome variable in analysis. Negatively phrased items

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<sup>143</sup>E.g., “It is hard for me to feel accepted at my school” or “I feel like a real part of my school.”

on the scale (e.g., “It is hard for me to feel accepted at my school”) are reverse-coded before inclusion in the aggregate mean and analyses.<sup>144</sup> Across the comparison groups, the mean differences on this measure show whether trans students find their school equally as welcoming as their heterosexual and LGBTQ+ cisgender peers do.

### **Social, Emotional, and Psychological Well-Being (SCS2 only)**

Social, emotional and psychological well-being measures included in the survey are the three sub-scales of the Mental Health Continuum Short-Form (MHC-SF), a validated three-category diagnosis of positive mental health (Orpana et al., 2017). The MHC-SF is part of the longer Mental Health Continuum (MHC) developed by Corey Keyes, which notably spearheaded an operational definition of mental health as positive functioning rather than the absence of negative symptoms (Keyes, 2002). The three sub-scales are comprised of fourteen statements of well-being. Students were asked to rate their agreement on six-point Likert scale (1 “Never” to 6 “Every day”).<sup>145</sup>

The social well-being index is comprised of five statements ranging from perceived social contribution to social acceptance.<sup>146</sup> The emotional well-being index is comprised of three simple statements on being happy, interested in and satisfied with life. Finally, the psychological well-being index is comprised of six statements<sup>147</sup> on themes of connection and self-assuredness in navigating the world. Descriptives for each individual measure as well as the aggregate index of overall well-being provide a broad picture of students’ well-being.

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<sup>144</sup>Overall scoring for this scale is inverted so the variable greater feelings of belonging correspond with greater numerical values.

<sup>145</sup>The statements represent reflections on a range of recent experiences and functioning, with instructions to “Check each option that best describes how often you have experienced or felt the following in the past month.”

<sup>146</sup>E.g., feeling “That you had something important to contribute to society.”

<sup>147</sup>E.g., “[feeling] That you have warm and trusting relationships with others.”

### Notes on Changes in Outcome Variables

The options for responses about offensive language<sup>148</sup> changed slightly between the First and Second School Climate Survey. The First Survey used the options “never, rarely, sometimes, and frequently” (Taylor & Peter, 2011a) while the Second Survey added “occasionally” (Peter et al., 2021). The results for this variable are presented with this context.

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<sup>148</sup>The frequency of having heard homophobic, transphobic, and sexist comments in school.

## Chapter 5: Descriptive Statistics and Frequencies

This chapter describes demographic characteristics as well as contextual variables to provide a picture of both the First and Second School Climate Survey samples. Only the proportions among each sample are provided for the cisgender and LGB students; more specific reporting and outcomes can be found in the reports outlining the results of the First and Second National School Climate Surveys (Peter et al., 2021; Taylor & Peter, 2011a). To keep the focus of this work on trans students, it is only these groups for whom the demographics, context, covariates, and finally the outcome variables<sup>149</sup> are provided. Most variables include results from both the First and Second School Climate Surveys.<sup>150</sup>

### Demographics: First School Climate Survey

The First School Climate Survey produced a large dataset ( $N = 3607$ ) with participation from across Canada, excepting Québec. Most youth (97%) were cisgender.

#### Trans (SCS1)

Less than five percent ( $N = 116$ ) of youth reported a trans identity (see Table 1, below, for specific identities). Respondents could select multiple options, and most trans youth (68%) used two or more options to describe their identity.

**Table 1**  
*Genders Reported by Trans Students: SCS1*

| Gender                                 | <i>N</i> | %  |
|--|----------|----|
| Two-Spirit: Aboriginal [sic] and Queer | 32       | 28 |
| Transgender                            | 50       | 43 |
| Transexual (male to female)            | 26       | 22 |

<sup>149</sup>Corresponding to the order the variables and measures are related in the previous section.

<sup>150</sup> Each sub-section presents the results in this order, with the First and Second Surveys labelled with the abbreviation SCS1 and SCS2 respectively.

| Table 1 (continued)         |                 |     |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|-----|
| Transexual (female to male) | 31              | 27  |
| Male                        | 37              | 32  |
| Female                      | 39              | 34  |
| Other                       | -- <sup>t</sup> | < 5 |
| All trans students          | 116             | 100 |

*Note: Total N may exceed numerical sum of categories (and percentages may sum to more than 100) as contributors could select more than one option*

*<sup>t</sup>n not reported for cell counts less than 5*

### **Racialization (SCS1)**

Less than half (41%) of these students indicated a potentially racialized identity. For this dissertation, a racialized identity is defined as selecting an option other than or in addition to a white racial identity.

### **Sexuality (SCS1)**

The majority (82%) of trans youth reported a LGBTQ+ identity. <sup>151</sup>A chi-square test showed trans youth were significantly more likely than cisgender youth to report a LGBTQ+ identity,  $\chi^2(1, 3342) = 165.60, p < .001$ .

### **Demographics: Second School Climate Survey**

The Second School Climate Survey generated a large dataset ( $N = 3558$ ) with contributions from youth in secondary schools across all Canadian provinces and territories. Most youth (88%) reported a cisgender identity (55% cisgender girls, and 33% cisgender boys). Most youth in the Second School Climate Survey ( $N = 2,385$ ; 66%) identified themselves as

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<sup>151</sup>As compared to only 26% of cisgender youth.

exclusively cisgender and heterosexual, with only 27% of cisgender youth reporting a LGBTQ+ identity. Only 13% of cisgender youth indicated a racialized identity.<sup>152</sup>

### Trans Students (SCS2)

The Second School Climate Survey reached a larger proportion of trans students than the First Survey ( $N = 398$ ); eleven percent of the overall sample. There was significant variation in the reported genders among the trans students (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Genders Reported by Trans Students: SCS2*

| Gender                  | <i>N</i> | %   |
|-------------------------|----------|-----|
| Two-Spirit [sic]        | 15       | < 5 |
| Nonbinary               | 192      | 48  |
| Genderfluid             | 60       | 15  |
| Agender                 | 37       | 9   |
| Trans                   | 145      | 36  |
| Transmasculine          | 113      | 28  |
| Transfeminine           | 12       | < 5 |
| Woman/girl              | 74       | 19  |
| Man/boy                 | 79       | 20  |
| Another gender identity | --†      | < 5 |
| All trans identities    | 398      | 100 |

*Note: Total N may exceed numerical sum of categories (and percentages may sum to more than 100) as contributors could select more than one option*

*†n not reported for cell counts less than 5*

<sup>152</sup>As defined by selecting an option other than white, or another racial identity option in addition to white racial identity.

### **Racialization (SCS2)**

Most trans youth indicated only a white racial identity, with only 23% indicating a potentially racialized identity (defined by selection of an identity other than white, or the selection of a white racial identity as well as another racial identity).

### **Sexuality (SCS2)**

Most trans students also indicated a LGBTQ+ identity (97%). A chi-square analysis showed a significant difference in proportions, with trans youth more likely than cisgender youth to report a LGBTQ+ identity,  $\chi^2(1, 3423) = 632.08, p < .001$ .

### **First School Climate Survey: Contextual Variables**

Descriptive statistics and frequencies in the following sections are for the trans students only unless otherwise identified (e.g., tables showing comparison groups). There were numerous variables in the National School Climate Surveys related to the experiences of trans students. Only the variables with the strongest theoretical relationship to the outcomes<sup>153</sup> were included as covariates in the model. Below are additional contextual variables which provide a more detailed picture of the school experiences surrounding trans youth.

### **Types of Anti-2SLGBTQIA+ Language Heard (SCS1)**

Canadian schools are filled with casual use of anti-2SLGBTQIA+ slurs, jokes, and criticisms of gender or sexuality expressions. More than half (53%) heard specific expressions like “faggot” or “dyke” daily.

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<sup>153</sup>Which also met the necessary criteria.

### **Disclosing Harassment or Assault (SCS1)**

Only 35% of trans students in the first survey said that they would report harassment or assault to school authorities, and less than thirty percent (28%) said they would tell their parents or guardian.

### **Physical Harassment Experiences (SCS1)**

Trans students most frequently received physical harassment based on their gender (26%), gender expression (35%), or sexual identity (24%).

### **Exclusion and Sexual Harassment Experiences (SCS1)**

Roughly half of trans students had been sexually harassed (51%).<sup>124</sup>

### **School Policies and Effect (SCS1)**

Almost half of trans students did not know if their school had a policy for addressing homophobia (47%). More than half did not know if their district had a policy in place (54%). Forty-seven percent found their school unsupportive of LGBTQ [sic]<sup>154</sup> people, and/or that teachers were “not effective” at addressing homophobic harassment.

## **Second School Climate Survey: Contextual Variables**

Statistics related refer to only the trans students only unless otherwise identified (e.g., tables showing comparison groups).

### **2SLGBTQIA+ Expression and Interests (SCS2)**

Most trans students (69%) had been required to use a washroom or changeroom inconsistent with their gender or knew another student who had been required to do this. Sixteen percent had been prevented from wearing clothes of a certain gender appearance.

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<sup>154</sup>See Footnote 53.

More than twenty percent had been prevented (by school staff) from using their chosen name or pronoun (23%) or seen this happen to another student (28%).

### **Types of Anti-2SLGBTQIA+ Language Heard (SCS2)**

In the years between the First and Second School Climate surveys, anti-2SLGBTQIA+ language was reduced but did not disappear from schools. Twenty-one (21%) percent of trans students said some or most of their peers used offensive terms for trans people like “shemale.”

### **Verbal Harassment (SCS2)**

More than 70% of trans students had been verbally harassed (see covariates section for more details).

### **Reporting Verbal Harassment to School Staff (SCS2)**

Twenty percent of trans students said they did not report verbal harassment because they did not think the school would do anything about it or did not think the school would handle the situation effectively. Some students did not report because they did not want to be outed as LGBTQ (11%). A small proportion (< 5%) said that school staff were homophobic or transphobic, or that staff had been the source of the harassment.

### **Physical Harassment Experiences (SCS2)**

In the second climate survey, most gender minority students said they had not experienced physical harassment based on their sexuality (82%) or perceived sexuality (85%). Seven percent said they were at least occasionally the subject of physical harassment due to their gender or perceived gender.

### **Reporting Physical Harassment to School Staff (SCS2 only)**

Of the students who did not wish to report, about half said they did not think staff would do anything about it (51%). Other trans students said that they:

- Felt concern for their safety (57%)
- Felt staff would not do anything which was effective (49%)
- Were embarrassed (44%)
- Did not want to be seen as a 'snitch' (39%)
- Did not want to be outed as LGBTQ\* (28%)

### **Exclusion and Sexual Harassment Experiences (SCS2)**

Forty-six percent of students had been excluded in their school environment because of their LGBTQ\* [sic]<sup>155</sup> identity; 35% had been the target of rumors, and 26% had been harassed online. Eight percent of trans students had been subjected to sexual humiliation.

### **School Policies and Effect (SCS2)**

More than half of trans students (57%) said their school was at least somewhat supportive of the LGBTQ\* community, but did not know if their school had a policy for addressing homophobia or transphobia (53%). Only 14% said their school responded effectively to transphobic harassment, while others said their school staff refused to address issues of transphobia (14%) or attempts to address transphobia were ineffective (36%).

### **Recommendations for Teachers (SCS2)**

Trans students endorsed several options that teachers should use to support the LGBTQ\* community which they wanted their teachers to know about. More than half wanted teachers to:

- Increase their knowledge about community specific resources (55%)
- Use language for specific identities (57%)

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<sup>155</sup>See Footnote 53.

- Include LGBTQ\* people as classroom examples (66%)
- Know about gender neutral pronoun options (68%)
- Reduce assumptions about gender and sexuality (68%)
- Know more about trans peoples' experiences (69%)

Many trans students also wanted teachers to avoid tokenizing them. They also wanted teachers to know how to support them in parent/guardian interactions, and to understand the importance of having school staff who were openly LGBTQ\* or openly supportive of LGBTQ\* students.

### **First School Climate Survey: Covariates**

Descriptive statistics and frequencies in the following sections are for trans students only unless otherwise identified (e.g., tables showing comparison groups).

#### **Queer Visibility and Inclusion (SCS1)**

On average, trans students who responded to the First School Climate Survey were aware of less than one instance ( $M = 0.63$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ) of LGBTQ [sic]<sup>156</sup> inclusion, in class or at school events such as assemblies.

#### **Queer Curriculum Inclusion (SCS1)**

At the time of the First School Climate Survey, few Canadian schools had classes which included LGBTQ [sic] content. A small proportion of LGBTQ [sic]<sup>157</sup> content was reported in:

- Planning/Health Education/Family Life classes (25%)
- Social Studies such as History or Geography (17%)
- English/Language Arts classes (15%)
- Current Events classes (13%)

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<sup>156</sup>See Footnote 53.

<sup>157</sup>See Footnote 53.

### **Disclosure (SCS1)**

In the First School Climate Survey, students were asked to indicate who they had disclosed their identity to at school if they were LGBTQ. Disclosure varied significantly, with different proportions of trans students saying they were:

- Out to everyone at school (22%)
- Out to 'most' people at school (14%)
- Out to "only a few friends at school" (25%)
- Out to one adult at school (10%)
- Not out to anyone at school (16%)

### **Anti-2SLGBTQIA+ Language Frequency (SCS1)**

More than half of trans students (63%) said they heard other students use anti-LGBTQ\* expressions daily, and many (43%) said teachers never intervened. Most trans students (78%) found it upsetting to hear anti-LGBTQ\* language at school.

### **Verbal Abuse (SCS1)**

The most common reason trans students reported for receiving verbal abuse was their gender expression (72%). Sixty percent or more had been verbally harassed about their perceived sexuality or gender, their gender identity specifically, or their sexual orientation. Thirty percent had been harassed due to their religion, ethnicity, or having LGBTQ [sic] parents.

### **Second School Climate Survey: Covariates**

Descriptive statistics and frequencies in the following sections are for trans students only unless otherwise identified (e.g., tables showing comparison groups).

### Parental Support (SCS2 only)

Trans students had moderate parental support ( $M = 2.85$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ; from a 9-item scale<sup>158</sup> with excellent internal reliability;  $\alpha = .91$ ). However, trans students had the lowest mean score compared to peer groups (see Table 3).

**Table 3**

*Parental Support: SCS2*

| Gender x Sexuality   | Parental Support |           |
|----------------------|------------------|-----------|
|                      | <i>M</i>         | <i>SD</i> |
| Cishet Girls         | 3.36             | 0.76      |
| Cishet Boys          | 3.30             | 0.79      |
| LGBQ* Cis Girls      | 3.08             | 0.65      |
| LGBQ* Cis Boys       | 3.16             | 0.73      |
| Trans Students (All) | 2.85             | 0.71      |
| SCS2: All Students   | 3.21             | 0.76      |

### Academic Self-Efficacy (SCS2 only)

Trans students related relatively high academic self-efficacy ( $M = 2.91$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ) on a 4-item scale ( $\alpha = .90$ ) ranging from 1 to 4. Other groups scores ranged higher (see Table 4 below).

**Table 4**

*Academic Self-Efficacy: SCS2*

| Gender x Sexuality   | Academic Self-Efficacy |           |
|----------------------|------------------------|-----------|
|                      | <i>M</i>               | <i>SD</i> |
| Cishet Girls         | 3.16                   | 0.66      |
| Cishet Boys          | 3.03                   | 0.74      |
| LGBQ* Cis Girls      | 3.11                   | 0.64      |
| LGBQ* Cis Boys       | 3.19                   | 0.66      |
| Trans Students (All) | 2.91                   | 0.68      |
| SCS2: All Students   | 3.08                   | 0.69      |

<sup>158</sup>Scored from 1 to 4. Inverted so higher scores are associated with higher parental support.

### Recreation and Participation (SCS2 only)

Trans students were active within a range of activities, with many regularly:

- Participating in after-school activities like debate regularly (30%)
- Working at a paying job regularly (20%)
- Attending religious services at least occasionally (17%)
- Volunteering in their community at least occasionally (58%)
- Participating in LGBTQ\* organizations at school at least occasionally (53%)

### Queer Visibility and Inclusion in School (SCS2)

Most trans students knew of at least one form of LGBTQ\* [sic]<sup>159</sup> visibility in their environment (see Table 5 for the various options offered for visibility, and their reported frequency in school environments). Only eight percent (8%) of trans students reported seeing no examples of queer visibility at their school.

**Table 5**

*Queer Visibility by Type: SCS2*

| Visibility Type                          | <i>N</i> | %  |
|--|----------|----|
| Books and/or videos                      | 187      | 47 |
| Magazines, newspapers or newsletters     | 53       | 13 |
| Pamphlets                                | 90       | 23 |
| Posters/pictures                         | 182      | 46 |
| Safe space/ally stickers                 | 236      | 59 |
| Displays of students work                | 93       | 23 |
| School publications                      | 24       | 6  |
| Performances (musicals, plays, concerts) | 47       | 12 |
| Human rights events /activities          | 69       | 17 |
| Student conferences /workshops           | 75       | 19 |
| Other                                    | 26       | 7  |

<sup>159</sup>See Footnote 53.

In classes which included content on dating and sexuality (e.g., Family Life), more than a third of trans students (36%) said LGBTQ\* [sic]<sup>160</sup> peoples' relationships were not included. Five percent said there was some reference to LGBTQ\* relationships but in a somewhat/very negative way.

### **Queer Curriculum Inclusion (SCS2)**

Though queer content moved into some curricula between the First and Second School Climate Surveys, twenty-eight (28%) of trans students said there was no LGBTQ\* content discussed in their class or present in their curriculum.

### **Disclosure of 2SLGBTQIA+ Identity (SCS2)**

In their school environment, most trans students were open about their identity to at least one group of people; only 5% said they were not out to anyone at their school.

- Out to everyone at school (32%)
- Out to at least one teacher (40%)
- Out to a guidance counsellor or nurse (27%)
- Out to another staff person (23%)
- Out to a principal or vice principal (13%)<sup>161</sup>
- Out to at least one friend at school (50%)
- Out to multiple classmates (51%)

### **Frequency of Anti-2SLGBTQIA+ Language (SCS2)**

Most trans students (61%) said they heard negative remarks about girls not acting “feminine” enough at least occasionally; 73% had similarly heard negative remarks about boys not behaving “masculinely” enough at least occasionally. Forty-six percent (46%) of these trans students heard dehumanizing anti-trans terms like “shemale” anywhere from monthly to daily.

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<sup>160</sup>See Footnote 53.

<sup>161</sup>Whose leadership has the potential to affect student achievement (Allensworth et al., 2021).

**Verbal Abuse (SCS2)**

The most common reason trans students reported for being verbally abused was their gender expression (72%). Most trans students (sixty percent or more) had also been verbally abused due to their perceived sexuality or gender, their gender identity specifically, or their sexual orientation. Thirty percent had been harassed for reasons unrelated to their gender identity or sexuality (e.g., religion).

**COVID-19 Shutdown (SCS2)**

For trans students, roughly 63% participated during the COVID-19 shutdown ( $n = 251$ ), while 37% participated before the shutdown occurred ( $n = 147$ ). For cisgender students, only 21% participated during the shutdown ( $n = 645$ ) while the other 79% ( $n = 2471$ ) had already completed the survey before the shutdown.

**First School Climate Survey: Outcome Variables**

Descriptive statistics and frequencies in the following sections are for the trans students only, unless otherwise identified (e.g., tables showing comparison groups). Areas of school deemed unsafe for LGBTQ\* people and their relatives, perceived school safety, feeling unsafe at school, and school belonging are present in both the First and Second School Climate Surveys. These are the outcome variables examined in analyses of the First School Climate Survey (for context) and in the merge comparison of the two surveys.

### School Areas Unsafe for LGBTQ People or their Relatives (SCS1)

While proportions varied, all the offered options (except for the open-ended ‘other’) for school spaces were deemed unsafe for LGBTQ [sic]<sup>162</sup> people or their relatives by at least 10% of the trans students (see Table 6 below).

**Table 6**

*School Areas Unsafe for LGBTQ People or their Relatives: SCS1 Trans Students*

| Area                         | N  | %  |
|------------------------------|----|----|
| Hallways                     | 65 | 56 |
| Cafeteria                    | 48 | 41 |
| Classrooms                   | 43 | 37 |
| Library                      | 24 | 21 |
| Stairwells /Under the stairs | 51 | 44 |
| Gymnasium                    | 44 | 38 |
| PE change room               | 64 | 55 |
| Schoolyard                   | 49 | 42 |
| Washrooms                    | 64 | 55 |
| School Chapel                | 11 | 10 |
| Counselor /Support rooms     | 11 | 10 |
| Office                       | 20 | 17 |
| School buses                 | 38 | 33 |
| Traveling to and from school | 41 | 35 |
| Other                        | 9  | 8  |

Most trans students (80%) felt at least one area in their school was unsafe for LGBTQ people or those related to them. The average number of unsafe places reported was higher for LGBTQ\* cisgender boys and girls (than their heterosexual counterparts), and highest for trans students (see Table 7 below).

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<sup>162</sup>See Footnote 53.

**Table 7***Mean Number of School Areas Unsafe for LGBTQ\* People or their Relatives: SCS1*

| Gender x Sexuality   | # of Unsafe Spaces |           |
|----------------------|--------------------|-----------|
|                      | <i>M</i>           | <i>SD</i> |
| Cishet Girls         | 2.35               | 3.98      |
| Cishet Boys          | 2.09               | 3.23      |
| LGBQ* Cis Girls      | 3.83               | 3.74      |
| LGBQ* Cis Boys       | 3.38               | 3.65      |
| Trans Students (All) | 4.59               | 4.08      |
| SCS1: All Students   | 2.61               | 3.67      |

**Feeling Unsafe at School (SCS1)**

Many trans students reported that they felt unsafe in their school, due to their:

- Gender identity (44%)
- Gender expression (50%)
- Sexual orientation (47%)
- Perceived sexual orientation (35%)
- Racial/ethnic identity (15%)
- Religion/perceived religion (15%)
- Other reasons (8%)
- LGBTQ identity of one or more parents (6%)

In analyses, this variable is combined into a single binary measure reflecting whether the contributing student felt unsafe at school due to any identity (see Table 8 below).

**Table 8***Proportion of Students Who Felt Unsafe at School: SCS1*

| Gender x Sexuality   | % of students who felt unsafe due to any identity |          |
|----------------------|---|----------|
|                      | <i>N</i>  | <i>%</i> |
| Cishet Girls         | 160   | 16       |
| Cishet Boys          | 201   | 14       |
| LGBQ* Cis Girls      | 232   | 73       |
| LGBQ* Cis Boys       | 306   | 56       |
| Trans Students (All) | 71  | 78       |
| SCS1: All Students   | 970   | 29       |

### School Belonging (SCS1)

On average, trans students reported relatively low levels of school belonging, across individual items as well as the combined mean ( $M = 2.41$ ,  $SD = 0.69$  on a 5-point scale). Other groups' mean scores all ranged slightly higher than trans students' (see Table 9 below).

**Table 9**

*School Belonging: SCS1*

| Gender x Sexuality   | School Belonging |           |
|----------------------|------------------|-----------|
|                      | <i>M</i>         | <i>SD</i> |
| Cishet Girls         | 3.01             | 0.57      |
| Cishet Boys          | 3.04             | 0.54      |
| LGBQ* Cis Girls      | 2.65             | 0.70      |
| LGBQ* Cis Boys       | 2.64             | 0.62      |
| Trans Students (All) | 2.41             | 0.69      |
| SCS1: All Students   | 2.91             | 0.61      |

The scale had good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

### Second School Climate Survey: Outcome Variables

Descriptive statistics and frequencies in the following sections are for the trans students only, unless otherwise identified (e.g., tables showing comparison groups). Areas of school deemed unsafe for LGBTQ\* people and their relatives, feeling unsafe at school, and school belonging are present in both the First and Second School Climate Surveys. These are the outcome variables outlined above for the First School Climate Survey (for context) and in the merge comparison of the two surveys. Perceived school safety for 2SLGBTQIA+ identities, and social, emotional and psychological well-being are examined for the Second Survey only.

### School Areas Unsafe for LGBTQ\* People or their Relatives (SCS2)

While proportions varied, all the offered options (except for the open-ended 'other') for school spaces were deemed unsafe for LGBTQ\* [sic]<sup>163</sup> people by at least 10% of trans students (see Table 10).

**Table 10**

*School Areas Unsafe for LGBTQ\* People or their Relatives: SCS2 Trans Students*

| Area                         | N   | %   |
|------------------------------|-----|-----|
| Hallways                     | 65  | 56  |
| Cafeteria                    | 48  | 41  |
| Classrooms                   | 43  | 37  |
| Library                      | 24  | 21  |
| Stairwells /Under the stairs | 51  | 44  |
| Gymnasium                    | 44  | 38  |
| PE change room               | 64  | 55  |
| Schoolyard                   | 49  | 42  |
| Washrooms                    | 64  | 55  |
| School Chapel                | 11  | 10  |
| Counselor /Support rooms     | 11  | 10  |
| Office                       | 20  | 17  |
| School buses                 | 38  | 33  |
| Traveling to and from school | 41  | 35  |
| Other                        | --† | > 5 |

†not reported for cell sizes less than 5

Nearly half (49%) of trans students said four or more spaces in their school felt unsafe for LGBTQ\* people and/or people with LGBTQ\* relatives.

Across all gender and sexuality comparison groups, each group on average identified at least 2 spaces in their school they felt were unsafe for LGBTQ\* people and/or people with LGBTQ\* relatives (see Table 11 below).

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<sup>163</sup>See Footnote 53.

**Table 11***Mean Number of School Areas Unsafe for LGBTQ\* People or their Relatives: SCS2*

| Gender x Sexuality   | # of Unsafe Spaces |           |
|----------------------|--------------------|-----------|
|                      | <i>M</i>           | <i>SD</i> |
| Cishet Girls         | 2.37               | 2.73      |
| Cishet Boys          | 1.92               | 2.88      |
| LGBQ* Cis Girls      | 3.06               | 2.82      |
| LGBQ* Cis Boys       | 2.82               | 3.42      |
| Trans Students (All) | 4.32               | 2.81      |
| SCS2: All Students   | 2.73               | 2.93      |

**Feeling Unsafe at School (SCS2)**

Most trans students (77%) felt unsafe at school due to their real or perceived gender or sexual identity, or how they expressed their gender. For analysis, students' affirmative responses for feeling unsafe at school for various 2SLGBTQIA+ identities were combined into a binary score of 0 (no/no answer) and 1 (indicated they felt unsafe at school due to any identity).

**Table 12***Feeling Unsafe at School: SCS2*

| Gender x Sexuality   | % of students who felt unsafe due to any identity |          |
|----------------------|---|----------|
|                      | <i>N</i>  | <i>%</i> |
| Cishet Girls         | 109   | 10       |
| Cishet Boys          | 85  | 9        |
| LGBQ* Cis Girls      | 388   | 47       |
| LGBQ* Cis Boys       | 59  | 46       |
| Trans Students (All) | 304   | 79       |
| SCS2: All Students   | 945   | 28       |

While all groups held some proportion of students who reported feeling unsafe at school due to any identity (see Table 12 above), trans students were the only group where the majority (79%) felt unsafe at school.

### Perceived School Safety for LGBTQ\* Identities (SCS2 only)

Nearly half of trans students (44%) said their school was not very safe for a transmasculine person or a nonbinary person. Fifty-eight (58%) said their school would not be very safe for a transfeminine person. Questions about LGBTQ\* and trans students respectively were used to make a mean score of perceived school safety for each group. Most groups rated safety relatively low (see Table 13 below).

**Table 13**

*Perceived School Safety for 2SLGBTQIA+ Identities: SCS2*

| Perceived School Safety for: | LGBQ* Students |           | Trans Students |           |
|------------------------------|----------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|
|                              | <i>M</i>       | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>       | <i>SD</i> |
| Gender x Sexuality           |                |           |                |           |
| Cishet Girls                 | 1.77           | 0.67      | 1.91           | 0.78      |
| Cishet Boys                  | 1.82           | 0.76      | 1.92           | 0.87      |
| LGBQ* Cis Girls              | 1.91           | 0.58      | 2.32           | 0.84      |
| LGBQ* Cis Boys               | 1.77           | 0.68      | 2.04           | 0.86      |
| Trans Students (All)         | 2.10           | 0.65      | 2.56           | 0.82      |
| SCS2: All Students           | 1.86           | 0.68      | 2.10           | 0.86      |

The average score for most groups is below 2 on the 4-point scale (1 “Not at all safe” to 4 “Very safe”) which would indicate a rating of "somewhat unsafe" or below.

### School Belonging (SCS2)

On average, trans students reported low school belonging on individual items as well as the scale mean ( $M = 2.41$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ ). The scale was inverted for analysis, so the low end of the Likert scale (1) corresponded to lower school belonging. Compared to trans students, other groups' reported school belonging was relatively higher (See Table 14 below).

**Table 14***School Belonging: SCS2*

| Gender x Sexuality   | School Belonging |           |
|----------------------|------------------|-----------|
|                      | <i>M</i>         | <i>SD</i> |
| Cishet Girls         | 1.83             | 0.63      |
| Cishet Boys          | 1.93             | 0.59      |
| LGBQ* Cis Girls      | 1.64             | 0.63      |
| LGBQ* Cis Boys       | 1.79             | 0.73      |
| Trans Students (All) | 1.42             | 0.66      |
| SCS2: All Students   | 1.76             | 0.65      |

The scale showed good internal consistency ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

### **Social, Emotional, and Psychological Well-Being (SCS2 only)**

The three separate well-being scales (social, emotional and psychological) included in the survey collectively form an index of overall well-being. Trans students had moderate to low scores across the respective indices.

**Table 15***Well-Being: SCS2*

| Gender x Sexuality   | Social Well-Being |           |
|----------------------|-------------------|-----------|
|                      | <i>M</i>          | <i>SD</i> |
| Cishet Girls         | 2.76              | 1.47      |
| Cishet Boys          | 3.01              | 1.57      |
| LGBQ* Cis Girls      | 1.90              | 1.20      |
| LGBQ* Cis Boys       | 2.47              | 1.33      |
| Trans Students (All) | 1.52              | 1.06      |
| SCS2: All Students   | 2.44              | 1.48      |

  

| Gender x Sexuality | Emotional Well-Being |           |
|--------------------|----------------------|-----------|
|                    | <i>M</i>             | <i>SD</i> |
| Cishet Girls       | 3.59                 | 1.27      |
| Cishet Boys        | 3.75                 | 1.39      |
| LGBQ* Cis Girls    | 2.86                 | 1.27      |
| LGBQ* Cis Boys     | 3.13                 | 1.36      |

Table 15 (continued)

| Trans Students (All)     | 2.22     | 1.17      |
|--------------------------|----------|-----------|
| SCS2: All Students       | 3.27     | 1.40      |
| Psychological Well-Being |          |           |
| Gender x Sexuality       | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| Cishet Girls             | 3.42     | 1.37      |
| Cishet Boys              | 3.56     | 1.45      |
| LGBQ* Cis Girls          | 2.52     | 1.27      |
| LGBQ* Cis Boys           | 3.04     | 1.40      |
| Trans Students (All)     | 2.20     | 1.22      |
| SCS2: All Students       | 3.06     | 1.45      |

Trans students had the lowest average outcome on social well-being ( $M = 1.52$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ,  $\alpha = .90$ ), with slightly higher scores across emotional well-being ( $M = 2.22$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ,  $\alpha = .93$ ) and psychological well-being ( $M = 2.20$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ,  $\alpha = .93$ ). See Table 15 above.

The combined indices above make up the MHC-SF Three Category Diagnosis of Positive Mental Health. Within this overarching variable, 42% of trans students had moderate positive mental health, and 7% were flourishing. However, about a third (33%) had overall mental health scores which would be classified as languishing.

### Variable Use in the Analyses

In the comparative analyses, covariates where appropriate are also converted into standardized log-scores. In addition to the variables provided for context above, further scope and analyses can be found in the reports outlining the results of the First and Second National School Climate Surveys (Peter et al., 2021; Taylor & Peter, 2011a), which show the range of variables considered in the creation of these analyses.

## Chapter 6: Results for Research Question 1 and 2

The purpose of the detailed statistics reported in the prior section is to provide the fullest possible picture of the experiences of trans students in Canadian schools. Are trans students in Canadian schools provided the same safety, security, and well-being as their cisgender peers? They are entitled to an equal environment, but the analyses below show they have a very different experience than their cisgender peers. Given that their environment is different, what factors contribute to better experiences and outcomes? The covariates included provide a more complete picture of students' lives by including variables related to the outcomes, which show the other characteristics and experiences which can help or hinder a trans student.

Trans students navigate a complex environment in which there are many factors which might affect their safety and well-being. They navigate a world designed to suppress and erase people of their gender and may face additional obstacles based on other identities. The analyses below challenge the idea that there is equal support and security for all students at Canadian schools and explore factors that may be related to the disparity in their experiences.

### **How Safe is Your School for...**

#### **[a student perceived as LGBTQ\* [sic]<sup>164</sup> or a student who has LGBTQ\* relatives]**

A bootstrapped (5000 sample) ANCOVA of the standardized log scores found no significant difference between comparison groups' (trans students, cisgender girls, cisgender boys, LGBTQ cis boys, and LGBTQ cis girls) mean school safety ratings,  $F(4, 2700) = 1.574, p = .178$ . See Table 16 below for the full results.

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<sup>164</sup>See Footnote 53.

**Table 16***ANCOVA: School Safety for Students Perceived as LGBTQ\* or with LGBTQ\* relatives*

| Source                 | Mean Square | F       | Sig.                | Partial $\eta^2$ |
|------------------------|-------------|---------|---------------------|------------------|
| Gender/Sexuality Group | 1.217       | 1.574   | .178                | .002             |
| Queer visibility       | 15.666      | 20.255  | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .007             |
| Parent Support         | 11.150      | 14.416  | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .005             |
| Verbal abuse           | 46.393      | 59.982  | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .022             |
| Academic self-efficacy | 1.985       | 2.566   | .109                | .001             |
| Participation          | 2.473       | 3.197   | .074                | .001             |
| Queer curriculum       | 3.616       | 4.675   | .031 <sup>†</sup>   | .002             |
| Anti-LGBTQ* language   | 232.051     | 300.027 | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .100             |
| Disclosure (“out”)     | 2.785       | 3.601   | .058                | .001             |
| COVID                  | .118        | .152    | .696                | .000             |

*Bootstrap results based on 5000 bootstrap samples*<sup>†</sup>significant at the .05 level <sup>††</sup>significant at the .01 level**How Safe is Your School for...[a transmasculine, transfeminine or nonbinary student]**

A bootstrapped ANCOVA of the standardized log scores found a significant difference between comparison groups’ (trans students, cishet girls, cishet boys, LGBQ cis boys, and LGBQ cis girls) mean ratings of their school's safety for trans students,  $F(4, 2753) = 6.231, p < .001$ .

See full results in Table 17 below.

**Table 17***ANCOVA: School Safety for Transmasculine, Transfeminine or Nonbinary Students*

| Source                 | Mean Square | F       | Sig.                | Partial $\eta^2$ |
|------------------------|-------------|---------|---------------------|------------------|
| Gender/Sexuality Group | 6.231       | 8.134   | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .012             |
| Queer visibility       | 8.271       | 10.798  | .001 <sup>††</sup>  | .004             |
| Parent Support         | 11.546      | 15.074  | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .005             |
| Verbal abuse           | 31.672      | 41.348  | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .015             |
| Academic self-efficacy | .194        | .253    | .615                | .000             |
| Participation          | 2.623       | 3.424   | .064                | .001             |
| Queer curriculum       | 1.433       | 1.871   | .172                | .001             |
| Anti-LGBTQ* language   | 211.945     | 276.693 | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .091             |
| Disclosure (“out”)     | .403        | .526    | .468                | .000             |
| COVID                  | 7.734       | 10.097  | .002 <sup>††</sup>  | .004             |

*Bootstrap results based on 5000 bootstrap samples*<sup>†</sup>significant at the .05 level <sup>††</sup>significant at the .01 level

Queer visibility, parent support, and verbal abuse were all significantly related to mean ratings of a school's safety for trans students (see Table 17 above), as were anti-LGBTQ\* [sic]<sup>165</sup> language and school attendance before vs. during the COVID shutdown.

**Table 18**

*Pairwise Comparisons: School Safety for Transmasculine, Transfeminine or Nonbinary Students*

| Reference Group | Comparison | Sig.                |
|-----------------|------------|---------------------|
| Trans youth     | CG-HET     | <.001 <sup>††</sup> |
|                 | CB-HET     | <.001 <sup>††</sup> |
|                 | CG-LGBQ+   | .205                |
|                 | CB-LGBQ+   | .002 <sup>††</sup>  |

*Bootstrap results based on 5000 bootstrap samples*

<sup>†</sup>significant at the .05 level <sup>††</sup>significant at the .01 level

Pairwise comparisons showed a significant difference (see Table 18, above) between trans students' ratings of school safety for trans students ( $M = 2.56$ ,  $SD = 0.82$ ), and all other groups except cisgender LGBTQ\* boys. All comparison groups (except cisgender LGBTQ\* boys) rated the mean safety of their school for trans students as lower than trans students themselves did (see Table 13 for descriptive statistics for all groups).

### **Do you ever feel unsafe at school due to [a minoritized identity, real or perceived]?**

Whether a student felt unsafe at school due to any marginalized identity was combined as a yes/no measure of feeling unsafe at school for any reason. Proportionate distribution of yes/no answers was examined across comparison groups (trans students, cishet girls, cishet boys, LGBTQ cis boys, and LGBTQ cis girls) using logistic regression, beginning with safety relative to heterosexual cisgender boys (the group with the most supported identities). The logistic regression showed a difference in the odds of feeling unsafe between groups, Wald's  $\chi^2(4, N = 3558) = 191.19$ ,  $p < .001$ , Nagelkerke's  $R^2 = 0.534$ . See Table 19 below for the full results.

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<sup>165</sup>See Footnote 53.

**Table 19***Odds of Feeling Unsafe at School Compared to Cisgender Heterosexual Boys*

|                                  | Sig.                | Exp(B) | 95% CI for Exp(B) |       |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|--------|-------------------|-------|
|                                  |                     |        | Lower             | Upper |
| <b>Gender x Sexuality Groups</b> |                     |        |                   |       |
| Trans students                   | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | 19.83  | 12.58             | 31.26 |
| Cisgender LGBTQ* girls           | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | 6.43   | 4.30              | 9.63  |
| Cisgender LGBTQ* boys            | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | 6.86   | 3.87              | 12.15 |
| Cisgender heterosexual girls     | .018 <sup>†</sup>   | 1.53   | 1.07              | 2.17  |
| <b>Covariates</b>                |                     |        |                   |       |
| Queer visibility                 | .809                | 1.02   | 0.89              | 1.16  |
| Parent support                   | .166                | 0.92   | 0.82              | 1.04  |
| Verbal harassment                | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | 2.56   | 2.27              | 2.90  |
| Academic self-efficacy           | .605                | 1.03   | 0.92              | 1.16  |
| Participation                    | .122                | 1.10   | 0.98              | 1.23  |
| Queer curriculum inclusion       | .444                | 1.05   | 0.93              | 1.19  |
| Anti-LGBTQ* language             | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | 1.54   | 1.34              | 1.77  |
| Disclosure                       | .930                | 1.00   | 0.89              | 1.11  |
| COVID-19 Shutdown                | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | 1.64   | 1.25              | 2.16  |

<sup>†</sup>significant at the .05 level <sup>††</sup>significant at the .01 level

Compared to cisgender boys who are heterosexual (CB-HET) all groups had significantly higher odds of feeling unsafe at school. Trans students had significantly higher odds of feeling unsafe compared to CB-HET boys, *OR* = 19.83. Cisgender LGBTQ\* girls and boys both had odds roughly 6 times higher than CB-HET boys, while the odds of cisgender girls were only slightly higher. To retain a focus on trans youth, the additional odds ratios (related below, Table 20) only examine the odds of trans youth feeling unsafe at school compared to other groups.

**Table 20***Trans Students' Odds of Feeling Unsafe at School Compared to Peer Groups*

| Reference Group | Comparison Group | Sig.                 | Exp(B) | 95% CI for Exp(B) |       |
|-----------------|------------------|----------------------|--------|-------------------|-------|
|                 |                  |                      |        | Lower             | Upper |
| CG-HET          | Trans youth      | < .001 <sup>††</sup> | 13.00  | 8.56              | 19.75 |
| CB-HET          |                  | <.001 <sup>††</sup>  | 19.83  | 12.58             | 31.26 |
| CG-LGBTQ*       |                  | < .001 <sup>††</sup> | 3.08   | 2.19              | 4.34  |
| CB-LGBTQ*       |                  | < .001 <sup>††</sup> | 2.89   | 1.66              | 5.02  |

<sup>†</sup>significant at the .05 level <sup>††</sup>significant at the .01 level

Trans students have higher odds of feeling unsafe than any other group (see Table 20 above). However, the odds ratios are larger between trans students and cisgender heterosexual students of both genders, compared to LGBTQ\* cisgender students (both boys and girls).

### School Belonging

Responses on the 10-item scale of school belonging were combined into an aggregate mean score of perceived safety. A bootstrapped ANCOVA of the standardized log scores found a significant difference between comparison groups' (trans students, cishet girls, cishet boys, LGBTQ cis boys, and LGBTQ cis girls) school safety ratings,  $F(4, 2308) = 6.131, p < .001$ . See full results in Table 21 below.

**Table 21**  
*Analysis of Covariance: School Belonging*

| Source                 | Mean Square | F      | Sig.                | Partial $\eta^2$ |
|------------------------|-------------|--------|---------------------|------------------|
| Gender/Sexuality Group | 5.872       | 6.131  | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .011             |
| Queer visibility       | .126        | .132   | .717                | .000             |
| Parent Support         | 5.151       | 5.378  | .020 <sup>†</sup>   | .002             |
| Verbal abuse           | .027        | .028   | .867                | .000             |
| Academic self-efficacy | 1.273       | 1.329  | .249                | .001             |
| Participation          | 12.343      | 12.886 | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .006             |
| Queer curriculum       | 7.108       | 7.421  | .006 <sup>†</sup>   | .003             |
| Anti-LGBTQ* language   | .206        | .215   | .643                | .000             |
| Disclosure ("out")     | .856        | .894   | .345                | .000             |
| COVID                  | 4.355       | 4.546  | .033 <sup>†</sup>   | .002             |

*Bootstrap results based on 5000 bootstrap samples*

<sup>†</sup>significant at the .05 level <sup>††</sup>significant at the .01 level

Parent support, participation in recreational activities, queer curriculum inclusion, and COVID had a significant effect on school belonging as well. Heterosexual cisgender boys had a higher mean log scores for belonging than all other groups but differed significantly from only trans youth ( $p < .001$ ), and cisgender LGBTQ+ girls ( $p = .002$ ).

**Table 22***Pairwise Comparisons for School Belonging*

| Reference Group | Comparison | Sig.                |
|-----------------|------------|---------------------|
| Trans youth     | CG-HET     | <.001 <sup>††</sup> |
|                 | CB-HET     | <.001 <sup>††</sup> |
|                 | CG-LGBQ*   | .016 <sup>†</sup>   |
|                 | CB-LGBQ*   | .021 <sup>†</sup>   |

*Bootstrap results based on 5000 bootstrap samples*

<sup>†</sup>significant at the .05 level <sup>††</sup>significant at the .01 level

Trans youth significantly differed from all other groups (see Table 22 above), with the lowest standardized log score of school belonging overall ( $M = 2.41$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ ). See Table 14 for descriptive statistics for all groups' school belonging.

**Social Well-Being**

Responses on the 5-item sub-scale of social well-being (MHC-SF Three Category Diagnosis of Positive Mental Health) were combined into an aggregate mean score of social well-being (see Table 15 for descriptive statistics). A bootstrapped ANCOVA of the standardized log scores found a significant difference in comparison groups' (trans students, cishet girls, cishet boys, LGBQ cis boys, and LGBQ cis girls) social well-being,  $F(4, 2497) = 23.786$ ,  $p < .001$ .

**Table 23***Analysis of Covariance: Social Well-Being*

| Source                 | Mean Square | F       | Sig.                | Partial $\eta^2$ |
|------------------------|-------------|---------|---------------------|------------------|
| Gender/Sexuality Group | 16.630      | 23.786  | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .037             |
| Queer visibility       | .187        | .267    | .605                | .000             |
| Parent Support         | 61.827      | 88.435  | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .034             |
| Verbal abuse           | 15.957      | 22.824  | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .009             |
| Academic self-efficacy | 65.813      | 94.136  | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .036             |
| Participation          | 81.332      | 116.334 | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .045             |
| Queer curriculum       | 9.137       | 13.070  | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .005             |
| Anti-LGBTQ* language   | 42.277      | 60.471  | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .024             |
| Disclosure ("out")     | 2.416       | 3.456   | .063                | .001             |
| COVID                  | 2.064       | 2.952   | .086                | .001             |

*Bootstrap results based on 5000 bootstrap samples*

<sup>††</sup>significant at the .01 level

Heterosexual cisgender boys had higher mean log scores for social well-being than all other groups but differed significantly from only trans youth ( $p < .001$ ), cisgender LGBTQ+ girls ( $p < .001$ ), and cisgender LGBTQ+ girls ( $p = .002$ ).

**Table 24**

*Pairwise Comparisons for Social Well-Being: Trans youth*

| Reference Group | Comparison | Sig.                |
|-----------------|------------|---------------------|
| Trans youth     | CG-HET     | <.001 <sup>††</sup> |
|                 | CB-HET     | <.001 <sup>††</sup> |
|                 | CG-LGBTQ+  | .029 <sup>†</sup>   |
|                 | CB-LGBTQ+  | <.001 <sup>††</sup> |

*Bootstrap results based on 5000 bootstrap samples*

<sup>†</sup>significant at the .05 level <sup>††</sup>significant at the .01 level

Pairwise comparisons (see Table 24, above) showed trans students' standardized log score of social well-being (see Table 15 for descriptive statistics) was significantly lower than all comparison groups'.

### **Emotional Well-Being**

Responses on the 3-item sub-scale of emotional well-being (MHC-SF Three Category Diagnosis of Positive Mental Health) were combined into an aggregate mean score of emotional well-being. A bootstrapped ANCOVA of the standardized log scores found a significant difference between comparison groups' (trans students, cisgender girls, cisgender boys, LGBTQ cis boys, and LGBTQ cis girls) emotional well-being,  $F(4, 2583) = 18.846, p < .001$ . See full results in Table 25 below.

**Table 25***Analysis of Covariance: Emotional Well-Being*

| Source                 | Mean Square | F       | Sig.                | Partial $\eta^2$ |
|------------------------|-------------|---------|---------------------|------------------|
| Gender/Sexuality Group | 13.445      | 18.846  | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .028             |
| Queer visibility       | .073        | .102    | .750                | .000             |
| Parent Support         | 92.869      | 130.169 | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .048             |
| Verbal abuse           | 31.330      | 43.914  | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .017             |
| Academic self-efficacy | 84.823      | 118.891 | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .044             |
| Participation          | 6.204       | 8.695   | .003 <sup>††</sup>  | .003             |
| Queer curriculum       | 3.674       | 5.149   | .023 <sup>†</sup>   | .002             |
| Anti-LGBTQ* language   | 22.439      | 31.451  | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .012             |
| Disclosure (“out”)     | .996        | 1.397   | .237                | .001             |
| COVID                  | .099        | .139    | .709                | .000             |

*Bootstrap results based on 5000 bootstrap samples*

<sup>†</sup>significant at the .05 level <sup>††</sup>significant at the .01 level

Heterosexual cisgender boys had higher mean log scores for emotional well-being (see Table 15 for descriptive statistics for all groups) than all other groups but differed significantly only from trans youth ( $p = .002$ ), cisgender LGBTQ+ girls ( $p < .001$ ), and cisgender LGBTQ+ girls ( $p < .001$ ).

**Table 26***Pairwise Comparisons for Emotional Well-Being: Trans youth*

| Reference Group | Comparison | Sig.                |
|-----------------|------------|---------------------|
| Trans youth     | CG-HET     | <.001 <sup>††</sup> |
|                 | CB-HET     | <.001 <sup>††</sup> |
|                 | CG-LGBTQ*  | <.001 <sup>††</sup> |
|                 | CB-LGBTQ*  | <.001 <sup>††</sup> |

*Bootstrap results based on 5000 bootstrap samples*

<sup>††</sup>significant at the .01 level

Pairwise comparisons (see Table 26, above) found trans youth significantly differed from all other groups with the lowest standardized log score of emotional well-being overall. See Table 15 for descriptive statistics for all groups.

## Psychological Well-Being

Responses on the 6-item sub-scale of psychological well-being (MHC-SF Three Category Diagnosis of Positive Mental Health) were combined for an aggregate mean score of psychological well-being. A bootstrapped ANCOVA of the standardized log scores found a significant difference between comparison groups' (trans students, cisgender girls, cisgender boys, LGBTQ cis boys, and LGBTQ cis girls) psychological well-being,  $F(4, 2525) = 18.788, p < .001$ . See Table 27 below for full results.

**Table 27**  
*Analysis of Covariance: Psychological Well-Being*

| Source                 | Mean Square | <i>F</i> | Sig.                | Partial $\eta^2$ |
|------------------------|-------------|----------|---------------------|------------------|
| Gender/Sexuality Group | 13.194      | 18.788   | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .029             |
| Queer visibility       | 2.075       | 2.955    | .086                | .001             |
| Parent Support         | 79.854      | 113.712  | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .043             |
| Verbal abuse           | 11.508      | 16.388   | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .006             |
| Academic self-efficacy | 128.552     | 183.057  | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .068             |
| Participation          | 18.723      | 26.662   | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .010             |
| Queer curriculum       | 2.506       | 3.568    | .059                | .001             |
| Anti-LGBTQ* language   | 27.195      | 38.726   | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .015             |
| Disclosure (“out”)     | 9.357       | 13.324   | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .005             |
| COVID                  | .180        | .256     | .613                | .000             |

*Bootstrap results based on 5000 bootstrap samples*

<sup>††</sup> significant at the .01 level

Heterosexual cisgender boys had higher mean log scores for psychological well-being than all other groups but differed significantly from only trans youth ( $p < .001$ ), cisgender LGBTQ\* girls ( $p < .001$ ), and cisgender LGBTQ\* girls ( $p < .001$ ). See Table 15 for descriptive statistics for all groups.

**Table 28***Pairwise Comparisons for Psychological Well-Being: Trans youth*

| Reference Group | Comparison | Sig.               |
|-----------------|------------|--------------------|
| Trans youth     | CG-HET     | <.001 <sup>†</sup> |
|                 | CB-HET     | <.001 <sup>†</sup> |
|                 | CG-LGBQ*   | .205               |
|                 | CB-LGBQ*   | <.001 <sup>†</sup> |

*Bootstrap results based on 5000 bootstrap samples*<sup>††</sup>*significant at the .01 level*

Pairwise comparisons (see Table 28, above) showed trans youth significantly differed from all other groups except cisgender LGBQ\* girls. Trans youth had the lowest standardized log score of psychological well-being overall.

### **Research Question 1 and 2: Summary**

Though trans students appear to already be sharply marginalized based on their gender identity, it is possible that trans youth who share another visible marginalized identity may experience different safety and security at school. The third research question explores this possibility for visibly racialized students within the trans sub-group specifically.

### Chapter 7: Results for Research Question 3

Trans students may share the experience of a marginalized gender identity, but as individuals they have other salient characteristics which can influence whether they are targeted for discrimination. In examining which intersections of identity result in the best and worst outcomes [for trans students in Canadian schools], race is an often-visible marker of identity which can shape trans students' school lives uniquely. Most trans students who participated in the survey were white ( $N = 283$ , 77%). Less than a quarter (23%,  $N = 86$ ) also positively indicated an identity which could be visibly racialized (a racial identity other than white, or in addition to a white racial identity).

#### How Safe is Your School for...

#### [a student perceived as LGBTQ\* [sic]<sup>166</sup> or a student who has LGBTQ\* relatives]?

Descriptive statistics for trans students showed relatively similar mean ratings of school safety for people with 2SLGBTQIA+ identities (or relatives), between racialized ( $M = 2.15$ ,  $SD = 0.08$ ) and non-racialized (white) trans students ( $M = 2.08$ ,  $SD = 0.05$ ). The aggregate mean of the 4-item scale of perceived safety was log-transformed and standardized. A bootstrapped (5000 sample) ANCOVA of these log scores found no significant difference between groups' school safety ratings,  $F(1, 300) = 0.757$ ,  $p = .385$ . See Table 29 below for full results.

**Table 29**

*ANCOVA: Trans Students' Perceived School Safety for 2SLGBTQIA+ Identities, by Racialization*

| Tests of Between-Subjects Effects: Perceived School Safety |             |        |                     |                  |
|--|-------------|--------|---------------------|------------------|
| Source   | Mean Square | F      | Sig.                | Partial $\eta^2$ |
| Racialization  | .389        | .757   | .385                | .003             |
| Queer visibility   | 5.144       | 10.020 | .002 <sup>++</sup>  | .032             |
| Parent Support   | 1.924       | 3.748  | .054                | .012             |
| Verbal abuse   | 10.756      | 20.952 | <.001 <sup>++</sup> | .065             |

<sup>166</sup>See Footnote 53.

Table 29 (continued)

|                        |        |        |                     |      |
|------------------------|--------|--------|---------------------|------|
| Academic self-efficacy | 1.102  | 2.147  | .144                | .007 |
| Participation          | .123   | .239   | .625                | .001 |
| Queer curriculum       | .579   | 1.129  | .289                | .004 |
| Anti-LGBTQ* language   | 18.257 | 35.564 | <.001 <sup>††</sup> | .106 |
| Disclosure (“out”)     | 1.186  | 2.311  | .130                | .008 |
| COVID                  | .038   | .074   | .786                | .000 |

<sup>†</sup>significant at the .05 level <sup>††</sup>significant at the .01 level

Though there was no significant effect of racialization, verbal abuse ( $p < .001$ ) and anti-LGBTQ\* [sic]<sup>167</sup> language ( $p < .001$ ) had a significant effect on perceived school safety among trans students.

### Do you ever feel unsafe at school due to [a minoritized identity, real or perceived]?

Whether a student felt unsafe at school due to any marginalized identity was combined as a yes/no measure of feeling unsafe at school for any reason. Among trans students, similar proportions of students felt unsafe among racialized (77%) and non-racialized (white) trans students (79%). Proportionate distribution of yes/no answers was examined using logistic regression, with non-racialized trans students (students who indicated only a white racial identity) as the reference group. The logistic regression model for feeling unsafe due to any identity was significant, Wald’s  $\chi^2(1, N = 333) = 73.07, p < .001$ , Nagelkerke’s  $R^2 = 0.305$ . See full results in Table 30 below.

**Table 30**

*Logistic Regression: Racialized Trans students’ Odds of Feeling Unsafe at School*

|                   | Sig.    | Exp(B) | 95% CI for Exp(B) |       |
|-------------------|---------|--------|-------------------|-------|
|                   |         |        | Lower             | Upper |
| Racialization     | .857    | .936   | .458              | 1.914 |
| Queer visibility  | .399    | .834   | .546              | 1.273 |
| Parent support    | .516    | .877   | .591              | 1.303 |
| Verbal harassment | <.001** | 2.270  | 1.556             | 3.310 |

<sup>167</sup>See Footnote 53.

| Academic self-efficacy     | .852   | 1.031 | .748  | 1.421 |
|----------------------------|--------|-------|-------|-------|
| Participation              | .779   | .950  | .663  | 1.360 |
| Queer curriculum inclusion | .920   | .982  | .693  | 1.393 |
| Anti-LGBTQ* language       | .003** | 1.848 | 1.227 | 2.783 |
| Disclosure                 | .733   | 1.047 | .804  | 1.364 |
| COVID                      | .776   | 1.096 | .585  | 2.053 |

\*significant at the .05 level \*\* significant at the .01 level

However, the proportions of trans students who felt unsafe at school due to any identity did not differ based on racialization ( $p = .857$ ) indicating the odds of racialized and non-racialized trans students feeling unsafe did not differ. Verbal harassment ( $p < .001$ ) and anti-LGBTQ\* [sic]<sup>168</sup> language ( $p < .001$ ) had a significant effect on whether students in this group felt unsafe.

### School Belonging

Responses on the 10-item scale of school belonging (scored from 0 to 3) were combined into an aggregate mean score of school belonging. Descriptive statistics for trans students showed relatively similar mean ratings of school belonging between racialized ( $M = 1.59$ ,  $SD = 0.08$ ) and non-racialized (white) trans students ( $M = 1.36$ ,  $SD = 0.05$ ). A bootstrapped (5000 sample) ANCOVA of the standardized log scores found no significant difference between groups' school safety ratings,  $F(2, 217) = 0.775$ ,  $p = .380$ . See full results in Table 31 below.

**Table 31**

*ANCOVA: School Belonging for Trans students by Racialization*

| Source           | Mean Square | F    | Sig. | Partial $\eta^2$ |
|------------------|-------------|------|------|------------------|
| Racialization    | .620        | .775 | .380 | .004             |
| Queer visibility | .133        | .167 | .684 | .001             |
| Parent Support   | .266        | .332 | .565 | .002             |
| Verbal abuse     | .442        | .552 | .458 | .003             |

<sup>168</sup>See Footnote 53.

Table 31 (continued)

|                        |       |       |        |      |
|------------------------|-------|-------|--------|------|
| Academic self-efficacy | .854  | 1.068 | .303   | .005 |
| Participation          | .001  | .001  | .970   | .000 |
| Queer curriculum       | 1.964 | 2.455 | .119   | .011 |
| Anti-LGBTQ* language   | .765  | .956  | .329   | .004 |
| Disclosure (“out”)     | .950  | 1.188 | .277   | .005 |
| COVID                  | 7.057 | 8.820 | .003** | .039 |

\*significant at the .05 level \*\*significant at the .01 level

There was no significant effect of racialization on mean log scores for school belonging.

The only covariate which had a significant effect on school belonging was COVID ( $p < .01$ ).

### Social Well-Being

Responses on the 5-item sub-scale of social well-being (MHC-SF Three Category Diagnosis of Positive Mental Health) were combined into an aggregate mean score of social well-being. Descriptive statistics for trans students showed relatively similar mean ratings of social well-being between racialized ( $M = 1.44$ ,  $SD = 0.12$ ) and non-racialized (white) students ( $M = 1.54$ ,  $SD = 0.08$ ). A bootstrapped (5000 sample) ANCOVA of the standardized log scores found no significant difference between groups’ social well-being,  $F(1, 286) = 2.302$ ,  $p = .130$ .

See full results in Table 32 below.

Table 32

ANCOVA: Trans Students' Social Well-Being by Racialization

| Tests of Between-Subjects Effects: Social Well-Being |             |        |         |                  |
|--|-------------|--------|---------|------------------|
| Source   | Mean Square | F      | Sig.    | Partial $\eta^2$ |
| Racialization  | 1.250       | 2.302  | .130    | .008             |
| Queer visibility                                     | .438        | .807   | .370    | .003             |
| Parent Support                                       | 6.796       | 12.519 | <.001** | .042             |
| Verbal abuse   | 3.884       | 7.155  | .008**  | .024             |
| Academic self-efficacy                               | 7.902       | 14.557 | <.001** | .048             |
| Participation  | 8.691       | 16.011 | <.001** | .053             |
| Queer curriculum                                     | 1.257       | 2.317  | .129    | .008             |
| Anti-LGBTQ* language                                 | .656        | 1.209  | .272    | .004             |
| Disclosure (“out”)                                   | .002        | .003   | .956    | .000             |
| COVID  | .046        | .085   | .770    | .000             |

\*significant at the .05 level \*\*significant at the .01 level

While there was no significant effect of racialization, parent support, academic self-efficacy, verbal harassment, and participation in extracurricular activities all had a significant effect on social well-being scores for trans students ( $p$ 's < .01).

### Emotional Well-Being

Responses on the 3-item sub-scale of emotional well-being (MHC-SF Three Category Diagnosis of Positive Mental Health) were combined into an aggregate mean score of emotional well-being. Descriptive statistics for trans students showed relatively similar mean ratings of emotional well-being between racialized ( $M = 2.14$ ,  $SD = 0.14$ ) and non-racialized (white) students ( $M = 2.23$ ,  $SD = 0.08$ ). A bootstrapped (5000 sample) ANCOVA of the standardized log scores found no significant difference between groups' emotional well-being,  $F(1, 287) = 0.819$ ,  $p = .366$ . See full results in Table 33 below.

**Table 33**

*ANCOVA: Trans Students' Emotional Well-Being by Racialization*

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects: Emotional Well-Being

| Source                 | Mean Square | $F$    | Sig.    | Partial $\eta^2$ |
|------------------------|-------------|--------|---------|------------------|
| Racialization          | .549        | .819   | .366    | .003             |
| Queer visibility       | .036        | .054   | .817    | .000             |
| Parent Support         | 18.348      | 27.342 | <.001** | .087             |
| Verbal abuse           | 6.558       | 9.773  | .002**  | .033             |
| Academic self-efficacy | 13.017      | 19.398 | <.001** | .063             |
| Participation          | 1.558       | 2.322  | .129    | .008             |
| Queer curriculum       | 2.407       | 3.586  | .059    | .012             |
| Anti-LGBTQ* language   | 1.145       | 1.706  | .193    | .006             |
| Disclosure ("out")     | .569        | .848   | .358    | .003             |
| COVID                  | 2.412       | 3.595  | .059    | .012             |

\*significant at the .05 level \*\*significant at the .01 level

While there was no significant effect of racialization, parent support, academic self-efficacy, and verbal harassment all had a significant effect on emotional well-being scores for trans students ( $p$ 's < .01).

## Psychological Well-Being

Responses on the 6-item sub-scale of social well-being (MHC-SF Three Category Diagnosis of Positive Mental Health) were combined into an aggregate mean score of psychological well-being. Descriptive statistics for trans students showed relatively similar mean ratings of psychological well-being between racialized ( $M = 2.13$ ,  $SD = 0.14$ ) and non-racialized (white) students ( $M = 2.23$ ,  $SD = 0.09$ ). A bootstrapped (5000 sample) ANCOVA of the standardized log scores found no significant difference between groups on psychological well-being,  $F(1, 286) = 1.059$ ,  $p = .304$ . See full results in Table 34 below.

**Table 34**

*ANCOVA: Trans Students' Psychological Well-Being by Racialization*

| Tests of Between-Subjects Effects: Psychological Well-Being |             |          |         |                  |
|---|-------------|----------|---------|------------------|
| Source  | Mean Square | <i>F</i> | Sig.    | Partial $\eta^2$ |
| Racialization   | .756        | 1.059    | .304    | .004             |
| Queer visibility  | 1.006       | 1.410    | .236    | .005             |
| Parent Support  | 10.949      | 15.344   | <.001** | .051             |
| Verbal abuse  | 1.133       | 1.587    | .209    | .006             |
| Academic self-efficacy                                      | 13.990      | 19.605   | <.001** | .064             |
| Participation   | 4.039       | 5.660    | .018*   | .019             |
| Queer curriculum  | 1.694       | 2.374    | .124    | .008             |
| Anti-LGBTQ* language  | .063        | .089     | .766    | .000             |
| Disclosure ("out")  | .797        | 1.116    | .292    | .004             |
| COVID   | .691        | .968     | .326    | .003             |

\*significant at the .05 level \*\*significant at the .01 level

While there was no significant effect of racialization, parent support ( $p < .001$ ), academic self-efficacy ( $p < .001$ ), and participation in extracurricular activities ( $p < .05$ ) all had a significant effect on trans students' psychological well-being.

### Research Question 3: Summary

Generally, trans students do not differ in their outcomes on safety and security based on racialization; possibly because all trans students' ratings of safety and security are quite low.

Trans students are sharply marginalized based on their gender, and the strong impact of this identity might obscure differences based on other intersections of identity.

Though being a trans student still has a big impact on school experiences, attitudes toward trans people have been changing in Canada, as well as supports and protection offered to trans students (Peter et al., 2021). In the next section, the experiences of trans students compared to their peers are examined across the First and Second National School Climate Survey datasets, to see if these changes have had a practical effect on their experiences.

### Chapter 8: Results for Research Question 4

Have trans students' experiences of safety and support in their school environment changed between the First and Second National School Climate Surveys? The results of the analyses from the Second School Climate Survey comparing gender minorities and their peers show that trans students do not experience the same safety and security at school that other students do.

This fourth research question explores whether the experiences of trans students in 2019/20 differ from the experiences of trans students in 2007/09, across the outcome variables shared between the two survey versions (i.e., the mean number of different school areas perceived to be safe for LGBTQ\* people or their relatives with marginalized identities, feeling unsafe at school, and school belonging) available in both surveys. Covariates included are those which were present in both surveys: queer curriculum, anti-LGBTQ\* language, and verbal abuse.

**What areas of your school do you feel are unsafe for LGBTQ\* students (or those perceived to be) or those with LGBTQ\* family members?**

Responses for each area (yes/no) were added together into a summary score of perceived safety, which was log-transformed and standardized for use in ANCOVA (see Table 7 for descriptive statistics for groups in Survey 1, and Table 11 for descriptive statistics for groups in Survey 2). A bootstrapped (5000 sample) ANCOVA of the standardized log scores found a significant difference between the number of areas groups considered unsafe,  $F(9, 6085) = 7.757, p < .001$ . There was also a significant effect of anti-LGBTQ\* language and verbal abuse on school safety. See full results in Table 35 below.

**Table 35***Bootstrapped ANCOVA: Number of School Areas Perceived Unsafe Across Surveys*

| Source                                     | Mean Square | F      | Sig.  | Partial $\eta^2$ |
|--|-------------|--------|-------|------------------|
| Gender/Sexuality Group by Survey Iteration | 6.442*      | 7.757  | <.001 | .011             |
| Queer curriculum                           | .137        | .165   | .684  | .000             |
| Anti-LGBTQ* language                       | 328.31*     | 395.29 | <.001 | .061             |
| Verbal abuse                               | 191.08*     | 230.06 | <.001 | .036             |

\*significant at the .01 level

There were significant differences between several of the groups within their own year. While the Second School Climate Survey results between groups have been reported in the previous chapters (in response to the first research question of this dissertation) the First Climate Survey comparisons between the same groups have not. These results are outlined below in Table 36 below. Comparisons prioritize comparing the means for all groups to those of trans students (see Table 7 for descriptive statistics for groups in Survey 1, and Table 11 for descriptive statistics for groups in Survey 2).

**Table 36***Bootstrapped Pairwise Comparisons for Number of Areas in School Perceived to be Unsafe*

| (I) Reference Group | (J) Comparison  | Mean Difference (I-J) | Sig. | 99% CI |       |
|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|------|--------|-------|
|                     |                 |                       |      | Lower  | Upper |
| Trans youth (SCS1)  | CG-HET (SCS1)   | .384*                 | .010 | .001   | .768  |
|                     | CB-HET (SCS1)   | .307                  | .124 | -.072  | .687  |
|                     | CG-LGBQ+ (SCS1) | .027                  | 1.00 | -.382  | .436  |
|                     | CB-LGBQ+ (SCS1) | .087                  | 1.00 | -.304  | .478  |
| Trans youth (SCS2)  | MG (SCS1)       | -.208                 | 1.00 | -.612  | .197  |
|                     | CG-HET (SCS1)   | .177                  | .131 | -.043  | .396  |
|                     | CB-HET (SCS1)   | .100                  | 1.00 | -.112  | .312  |
|                     | CG-LGBQ+ (SCS1) | -.180                 | .519 | -.444  | .083  |
|                     | CB-LGBQ+ (SCS1) | -.121                 | 1.00 | -.355  | .114  |

\*significant at the .01 level

### Do you ever feel unsafe at school due to [a minoritized identity, real or perceived]?

Whether a student felt unsafe at school due to any marginalized identity was combined as a yes/no measure of feeling unsafe at school for any reason (See Table 8 for descriptive statistics for Survey 1, and Table 12 for Survey 2). None of the covariates (queer curriculum, anti-LGBTQ\* language, and verbal abuse) met the criteria for inclusion in the logistic regression. Proportionate distribution of yes/no answers was examined across groups using logistic regression, beginning with experiences of feeling unsafe relative to heterosexual cisgender boys (the group with the most supported identities). This is to establish a baseline of the safety other groups might reasonably aspire to.

The logistic regression was significant, Wald's  $\chi^2(9, N = 7165) = 1675.96, p < .001$ , Nagelkerke's  $R^2 = 0.320$ . Below (Table 37) odds are shown for the likelihood of each group feeling unsafe at school compared to the trans students in the First School Climate Survey.

**Table 37**

*Logistic Regression: Odds of Feeling Unsafe at School by Gender and Sexuality*

| Comparison Group | Sig.  | Exp(B) | 95% CI for Exp(B) |       |
|------------------|-------|--------|-------------------|-------|
|                  |       |        | Lower             | Upper |
| CG-HET (SCS1)    | <.001 | .072*  | .053              | .097  |
| CB-HET (SCS1)    | <.001 | .061*  | .045              | .081  |
| CG-LGBQ (SCS1)   | <.001 | .473*  | .350              | .639  |
| CB-LGBQ (SCS1)   | .353  | 1.301  | .747              | 2.27  |
| CG-HET (SCS2)    | <.001 | .040*  | .029              | .056  |
| CB-HET (SCS2)    | <.001 | .032*  | .023              | .044  |
| CG-LGBQ (SCS2)   | <.001 | .221*  | .166              | .294  |
| CB-LGBQ (SCS2)   | <.001 | .190*  | .122              | .295  |
| MG (SCS2)        | .334  | 1.184  | .841              | 1.67  |

Reference Group: SCS1 Trans Students

\*significant at the .01 level

There were significantly lower odds of all groups in each year feeling unsafe compared to trans students in the First School Climate Survey, except for LGBTQ cisgender boys in the First Survey, and trans students in the Second Survey.

### School Belonging

Mean responses from the 10-item scale were combined into an aggregate mean score of school belonging which was log-transformed and standardized for use in ANCOVA (see Tables 9 and 14 for descriptive statistics for Survey 1 and 2 respectively). A bootstrapped (5000 sample) ANCOVA of the standardized log scores found a significant difference between groups' school belonging scores,  $F(9, 5589) = 20.99$ ,  $p < .001$ , and there was a significant effect of anti-LGBTQ\* language, and verbal abuse, on students' sense of school belonging. See full results in Table 38 below.

**Table 38**

*Bootstrapped ANCOVA: School Belonging Across Surveys by Gender and Sexuality*

| Source                                     | Mean Square | <i>F</i> | Sig.  | Partial $\eta^2$ |
|--|-------------|----------|-------|------------------|
| Gender/Sexuality Group by Survey Iteration | 18.93*      | 20.99    | <.001 | .033             |
| Queer curriculum                           | 0.135       | 0.150    | .699  | .000             |
| Anti-LGBTQ* language                       | 16.79*      | 18.62    | <.001 | .003             |
| Verbal abuse                               | 138.12*     | 153.17   | <.001 | .027             |

*\*significant at the .01 level*

There were significant differences between several of the groups within their own year. While the Second School Climate Survey results between groups have been reported in the previous chapters (in response to the first research question of this dissertation) the First Climate Survey comparisons between the same groups have not. These results are outlined below in Table 39. First related are the comparisons between the First School Climate Survey trans students and other students within that same survey year. This is followed by the

comparison of the trans students of the Second School Climate Survey and all groups of the First School Climate Survey.

**Table 39**  
*Bootstrapped Pairwise Comparisons for School Belonging*

| (I) Reference Group | (J) Comparison  | Mean Difference (I-J) | Sig.  | 99% CI |        |
|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-------|--------|--------|
|                     |                 |                       |       | Lower  | Upper  |
| Trans youth (SCS1)  | CG-HET (SCS1)   | -.793*                | <.001 | -1.194 | -0.392 |
|                     | CB-HET (SCS1)   | -.794*                | <.001 | -1.191 | -0.397 |
|                     | CG-LGBQ+ (SCS1) | -.317                 | .278  | -0.744 | 0.110  |
|                     | CB-LGBQ+ (SCS1) | -.290                 | .396  | -0.698 | 0.119  |
| Trans youth (SCS2)  | MG (SCS1)       | .535*                 | <.001 | .096   | .974   |
|                     | CG-HET (SCS1)   | -.258*                | .010  | -.515  | -.001  |
|                     | CB-HET (SCS1)   | -.259*                | .006  | -.508  | -.009  |
|                     | CG-LGBQ+ (SCS1) | .218                  | .334  | -.083  | .520   |
|                     | CB-LGBQ+ (SCS1) | .245*                 | .039  | -.027  | .518   |

*\*significant at the .01 level*

Trans youth in the First School Climate Survey did not significantly differ from LGBQ+ students of both binary cisgender identities, on the amount of school belonging they felt. Trans youth in this survey did differ from cisgender heterosexual boys and girls, feeling significantly less school belonging than both groups.

However, trans students from the First School Climate Survey did differ from students with the same identity in the Second School Climate Survey; the trans students in the Second School Climate Survey reported feeling less school belonging. The trans students of the Second School Climate Survey did not significantly differ from the school belonging felt by their cisgender LGBQ+ peers who were girls; however, they did feel less like they belonged in their school than cisgender heterosexual students of both genders. Surprisingly, trans students in the Second Survey reported higher school belonging than LGBQ+ cisgender boy peers.

#### Research Question 4: Summary

Trans students did not differ significantly in their ratings of how many areas of their school were unsafe across the First and Second School Climate Surveys, a concerning outcome given the efforts made to change policies and supports for trans students in the intervening years (Peter et al., 2021). Students appear to share perspectives on this, as students of other genders within both surveys (except for cisgender girls in the First School Climate Survey, who rated a significantly higher number of school areas unsafe than trans students within that survey) had similar perceptions of their school's safety for LGBTQ\* people and their relatives.

In the First School Climate Survey, all other groups of students felt significantly safer at school than trans students. The feelings of safety trans students held in the Second School Climate Survey were no different than the students with the same identity in the First School Climate Survey. Though supports, attitudes and/or policies might have changed, these made no difference to how safe trans students felt.

Finally, the sense of school belonging felt by trans students does not appear to have changed significantly in the years intervening between the First and Second School Climate Surveys. The trans students in the First School Climate Survey felt less school belonging than their heterosexual cisgender peers, though there was not a significant difference between their sense of belonging and their LGBTQ+ cisgender peers. However, they appear to have felt a slightly higher sense of school belonging than the trans students who contributed to the Second School Climate Survey. In the next chapter, the possible reasons for these differences are outlined, including cultural shifts, policy changes, and human rights protections.

## Chapter 9: Discussion

The First and Second School Climate Surveys captured distinct moments in Canada's progression toward equal rights and protections for people of all genders. Canada's attitudes toward trans people changed significantly within this ten-year period (Cossman, 2018; Cossman & Katri, 2017) as did attitudes to gender in general (Andres & Adamuti-Trache, 2008; McMahon, 2024; Pickel & Sivachandran, 2024; Simes, 2023; Stehr et al., 2024; Vanner & Almansori, 2024). One of the most valuable contributions of this dissertation to trans communities is the opportunity to examine how school environments have changed for trans students between 2007/9 and 2019/20.

Around the time of the First National Climate Survey, there was new visibility and increased acceptance of trans people within public life in North America (Elliott & Bonauto, 2005; Gilley, 2006; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Rayside, 2008) and globally (Marks, 2006). While progress continued between 2010 and 2020, that progress was not linear. Political backlash to these advances has often made trans people the target of violence, harassment, and attempts to reverse the rights they fought so long to attain (Bauer et al., 2009; Bauer et al., 2011; Bauer & Scheim, 2015; Williams et al., 2017). Acceptance and support from the public progressed more quickly for trans people in this period than in many previous decades (see Gentile et al., 2017 for discussion of how trans\* rights were left behind in many previous LGBTQ movements). Unfortunately, this did not necessarily translate into tangible gains in rights and protections, or the enforcement of them (Vipond, 2015).

This inconsistent history means it is especially important to examine trans rights in depth rather than assume trans people have received substantial benefit from the visible

advances of 2SLGBTQIA+ movements in Canada (which may have left them out of certain gains; Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity, 2018). Are trans people more likely to be thriving today? Are they respected, and free from harm?

This dissertation provides some insight into these larger questions by examining a microcosm of the trans experience in Canada: trans students in Canadian schools. Like all Canadians under the age of majority, trans students have little agency in their day-to-day activities and surroundings. They depend on the adults in their lives to provide them safety and support. They provide valuable insight for how we treat trans people in Canada; because of all the trans people in Canada this group is arguably owed the most care and protection.

In this chapter, the results of the analyses are discussed in terms of the research questions. Are trans students provided the same safety, security, and well-being as their cisgender peers? What contributes to better outcomes? Has the treatment of trans students improved since the First School Climate survey? First, key findings are summarized in terms of their support for the research question. Second, these results are discussed relative to the literature and theoretical framework. Third, limitations are outlined, followed by directions for future research which could provide further insights. Fourth, the significance of this dissertation and its' contribution to the field are discussed, followed by concluding remarks.

**Research Question 1: Are Trans students in Canadian Schools Provided the Same Safety, Security, and Well-Being as Their Cisgender Peers?**

Trans students are not provided the safety and security of their peers, and their reported well-being is significantly lower. Their odds of feeling unsafe at school are 20 times those of cisgender heterosexual boys, and 13 times those of cisgender girls. Trans students

have significantly lower scores of school belonging compared to every other group, some of whom face their own stigmas and inequalities (e.g., sexism, homophobia). Trans students have lower well-being scores in every category - emotional, psychological, and social. These scores are significantly lower than all other groups in every category except psychological well-being, where they did not differ significantly from cisgender LGBTQ+ girls. This is consistent with previous literature, which has found schools are not typically an environment that keeps trans students safe and foster well-being (Airton et al., 2022; Allen et al., 2020; Martino et al., 2022a; Martino et al., 2022b; Marx & Kettrey, 2016; Peter et al., 2021; Reisner et al., 2020; Sadowski et al., 2009; Schey, 2022; Taylor & Peter, 2011a).

Trans students face a significantly difference public school experience than even their LGBTQ\* [sic]<sup>169</sup> peers. Research where 2SLGBTQIA+ people are grouped together for analyses might overestimate the safety and well-being of trans students because the inclusion of cisgender LGBTQ\* students could inflate the mean. This dissertation adds to the growing body of literature which examines trans students separately (for various examples of a focus specifically on trans people in research, see Allen et al., 2020; Andrzejewski et al., 2020; Casper et al., 2022; Dixon et al., 2022). These findings support the necessity of separate analyses to avoid overlooking when trans students might be more sharply disadvantaged.

### **Safety**

Based on their own and peers' judgements, most schools are not even "somewhat safe" for trans students. There were no school areas which all trans students said they felt safe in. More than half said heavily used or necessary spaces like the washrooms, changerooms and

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<sup>169</sup>See Footnote 53.

hallways were unsafe for them. An average of five spaces were deemed unsafe by trans students in the schools where they spend their day to day lives. This is consistent with previous research on the treatment of trans people in schools (e.g., Day et al., 2019; Diaz et al., 2010; Gorse et al., 2021) as well as in Canadian society, where discrimination and violence can be commonplace (Meyer, 2015; Meyer et al., 2016; Vipond, 2015). This dissertation confirms the outcomes are still more negative than peers' for trans Canadian students, as recently as 2019. This should be shocking. These schools are subject to the oversight of provincial government. It is even more concerning that the changes undertaken in the time between the First and Second School Climate Surveys (for example, Bill C-16; Cossman, 2018; Cossman & Katri, 2017; DeGagne, 2021; Walker, 2020) have not significantly improved the conditions faced by trans students. It seems unlikely that Canadian schools would be allowed to continue in this state if all students were this unsafe, which suggests these conditions may be allowed to persist in schools because the affected students are trans.

In reference to themselves personally, 77% of trans students felt unsafe at school due to their gender, sexual orientation, or how others perceived their gender or sexual orientation. Mean ratings of school safety for LGBTQ\* [sic]<sup>170</sup> students and their relatives were low but did not differ between groups. However, mean ratings of school safety for trans students specifically showed a significant difference. Trans students rated their school as significantly less safe, compared to all groups except cisgender LGB girls. The latter is primarily discussed below and in reference to the covariates. Much of the literature connected to the experiences of trans youth and the violence they experience examines LGBTQ\* youth as a group. This

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<sup>170</sup>See Footnote 53.

grouping is often a necessity due to the small numbers of trans youth and the need to have adequate sample sizes to produce a useful work for the community.<sup>171</sup> Such research contributes substantially to this dissertation. The ability to focus solely on trans youth in these analyses is an unusual advantage, due to the large sample sizes of the National School Climate Surveys being made available.

Safety ratings for LGBTQ\* students and their families are revisited because they represent much of the research that includes trans people. This literature connected to LGBTQ\* students' experience also holds significant insight because of how discrimination based on gender and sexuality can often overlap (Alldred, 2023). For example, homophobic violence could include targeting boys behaving in a "feminine" way, but actions indistinguishable in intent could include targeting of trans girls who are being perceived as "boys" by their aggressors. Moreover, trans students are significantly less likely to feel safe at school than any other group, with odds 3 times higher than LGB cis students, and 13-20 times higher than cisgender students.

Trans students did not rate their school's safety for themselves as lower than their peers did (in fact, they rated it higher) but all students' rating of their school safety for trans students are low. This suggests fears for trans students' safety are justified. None of the student groups (trans, heterosexual cisgender, and LGB cisgender) rated their school as even "somewhat safe" for trans students. The perspectives of the different groups also add nuance to our understanding of safety in schools. The trans students have firsthand experience of their safety

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<sup>171</sup>This is also to allow sufficient numbers to protect participants' identities and avoid making them the targets of unwanted attention.

to draw on, while responses of the cisgender students represent a significantly larger sample. For the latter, their rating of safety can be considered a very reliable reflection of the views of the student population. It is shocking that this large group of cisgender students clearly does not think their school is safe for trans students.

The lower safety ratings for trans students are supported by the literature (Allen et al., 2020; Bauer, 2002; Kearns et al., 2017; Lapointe, 2015; Loutzenheiser, 2015; Marx & Kettrey, 2016; Paechter et al., 2021; Porta et al., 2017; Randolph et al., 2008; Wernick et al., 2017). Transgender, nonbinary and other trans youth are disproportionately the targets of classmate aggression (Bauer, 2002; Taylor et al., 2020; Wright-Maley et al., 2016) and this is common knowledge within the student body (Horn, 2006, 2008). It also reflects the treatment trans students are likely to face in Canadian society after they leave school (Baker & Lucas, 2017; Bauer et al., 2011; Bauer & Scheim, 2015; Marchitelli, 2018; Ristock, 2010).

However, the lack of difference in the mean safety rating for the overall safety scale (safety for LGBTQ\* people and their relatives) was at odds with the expectations outlined earlier in this dissertation. Students who are part of the minoritized group<sup>172</sup> were expected to rate their safety lower from the particular insight given by being part of the targeted group (Andrzejewski et al., 2020; Browne et al., 2011; Hesse-Biber, 2012a). This could include heightened awareness of violence (because it could be directed at them) or personal experience with it, a perspective not available to the majority group (Code, 1991).

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<sup>172</sup>A group known to be targets of violence in school (Meyer, 2015; Meyer et al., 2016; Peter et al., 2021; Randolph et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2020; Taylor & Peter, 2011a; Veale et al., 2015; Wernick et al., 2017).

In fact, almost all other groups (except cisgender LGBTQ\* boys) rated their school as less safe for trans youth than trans youth themselves did. The lack of safety for trans students is exceptionally concerning. However, it is equally concerning that few of them have considered their school authorities as a useful source of support. For example, when facing verbal, physical or sexual harassment. Many trans students indicated they did not even report harassment to their school.

### **School Belonging**

Trans students are significantly less likely to feel they belong in their school compared to cisgender peers. Trans students' school belonging was lower than every other group, which is particularly notable because these comparisons include groups which also face stigma and discrimination at school (e.g., lesbian students; Peter et al., 2015b). School is where young Canadians spend most of their weekday time, and all students should feel they belong there. Adolescents particularly need to feel they belong while they grow their social skills and build relationships (Allen & Bowles, 2012).

Based on previous research, lower school belonging on the part of trans students is intertwined with other factors in their school environment. For example, lacking peer community and connections (Wilson & Liss, 2023). Based solely on the proportions in the general population, trans, nonbinary students and other minority genders are simply unlikely to have many students around who share their experiences. They will also experience a multitude of small stressors and indignities ("minority stress theory") which can impact their well-being and sense of belonging (Hatchel et al., 2019b). Essentially, their school environments do not support their ability to feel that they belong. In summary, if trans students are allowed to be

victimized by peers (safety) and made to feel they don't belong, their well-being will correspondingly suffer (Hatchel & Marx, 2018).

Further research on post-secondary experiences show that this is part of a distressing pattern of treatment, and trans students will go on to feel a lower sense of belonging to their post-secondary settings as well (White & Jenkins, 2017; Wilson & Liss, 2023). Secondary school settings where students are not safe and feel they do not belong could put trans students at greater risk to feel this disconnection in their school settings later, which also risks lowering their academic performance and well-being (Blankenau et al., 2023).

School belonging is connected to several factors which represent trans students' ability thrive (Moffa et al., 2020). The outcomes are not all negative for trans students. Many previous works show that trans youth build resilience and strength through their experiences of adversity (Asakura, 2019; Poteat et al., 2011; Taube & Mussap, 2020). However, they should not have to learn resilience in response to their treatment at school. Trans students have the right to feel protected and connected in their school community.

School belonging is especially important for trans students because trans people are often made to feel they do not belong within public spaces (Gentile et al., 2017; Meyer, 2015; Wells, 2021). Belonging promotes positive mental health (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010; Moffa et al., 2020). Improved school belonging could help offset the lack of connection that trans students are at risk of due to transphobia in their peer groups or their homes (Fish et al., 2020).

Steps as simple as providing scaffolding for the creation of strong peer relationships, or creating a GSA, can help trans students to feel connected and increase their sense of belonging (Porta et al., 2017; Sadowski et al., 2009). Cisgender youth (Cumming-Potvin, 2023; Lapointe,

2015) as well as LGBTQ youth (Marx & Kettrey, 2016; Porta et al., 2017) endorse the value of GSAs as safe spaces for queer and trans students. The salient question these results raise is: if school belonging could be raised with such small actions of outreach, why have they not been undertaken? The political environment is a likely culprit as protections have often been advanced or retracted based on the parties in power (Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity, 2018; DeGagne, 2021; Walker, 2020). Though this context cannot be removed from the perspectives of Canadians whose decisions shape school policies, it should be. Keeping minors in Canadian schools safe and respected should not hinge on whether the adults in power take issue with their personal identity.

Currently schools do not reflect trans students and their needs. Many trans students or their parents are the ones who must advocate for ways to respectfully include them in school life (Davy & Cordoba, 2020). As increasing numbers of trans people come out at younger ages every year (Nolan et al., 2019). There is no excuse for schools to be so unprepared to include them. Heterosexual cisgender populations are included. Their identities are heavily referenced in school curriculum, and most staff and faculty are cisgender and heterosexual (Brett, 2024). Trans people are rarely present and/or visible in school spaces (Peter et al., 2021). Unsurprisingly this lack of visibility has a negative effect on their mental health and overall well-being (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006). Under these circumstances, it is predictable that trans students feel significantly less connected to their school than every other group. As this could affect their stress (Veale et al., 2017a; Veale et al., 2017b), academic performance (Blankenau et al., 2023; Day et al., 2019), well-being (Wernick et al., 2017), and safety (Hammack et al., 2021), it is worth prioritizing. An accepting and supportive school environment has been shown

to foster school connection for trans students in other countries (Ullman, 2022) and the steps to do so within Canada are within reach.

### **Well-being**

With a generally unsafe and disconnected school experience, it is not surprising that trans students' well-being was significantly lower than other groups in almost every measure. Trans youth significantly differed from all other groups (apart from LGBTQ+ girls, on psychological well-being), scoring the lowest means in social, emotional and psychological well-being. Thirty-three percent had scores on the overall measure (the Mental Health Continuum Short-Form, from the aggregate score of all three sub-scales) classified as languishing. Languishing refers to an absence of positive mental health associated with poor psychosocial functioning and poor emotional health (Keyes, 2002; Lamers et al., 2011).

The other student groups in the comparison (LGBTQ+ youth, cisgender youth) did not necessarily have high mean scores of well-being. On several of the sub-scales, mean scores for either cisgender LGBTQ+ boys or girls were moderate rather than high. However, trans students' scores on all three measures of well-being were still significantly lower than these moderate scores (except for LGBTQ+ girls, on psychological well-being).

Well-being is intertwined with many aspects of students' lives (e.g., Smith et al., 2019), and for trans students the literature links well-being closely to the other two outcome variables (safety and school belonging). For 2SLGBTQIA+ students, training for educators that fosters supportive attitudes, policies that explicitly protect them from harassment, and school events and materials that reflect their identities all enhance well-being, as does the absence of physical and verbal harassment (Peter et al., 2021). Pushing to improve well-being is complex,

because as Taylor and Peter (2011a) note: “Canadian law protects people from discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, but our public schools do not fulfill their ethical and legal obligations where sexual and gender minority youth are concerned” (p. 275).

It would not help to push for the protection of trans rights because ostensibly those protections are already in place. The relatively lower safety, belonging and well-being ratings of trans students show these protections are not being monitored or enforced. In addition, efforts to support trans students are still heavily focused on mitigating low well-being (e.g., Taylor et al., 2016a; Wernick et al., 2017). Significant advancement will have to be made in simply protecting trans students from harm before efforts to promote their well-being<sup>173</sup> can focus on contemporary standards of positive mental health and flourishing (Keyes, 2002, 2006, 2013). Trans students deserve to flourish.

Trans students' well-being is affected by their school environment, but also by the society that surrounds it. For trans students, this society holds half-hearted protections (Hébert, 2020; Tam & Hines, 2010) and active opposition of their rights (DeGagne, 2021; Hodge et al., 2019; Ramsay, 2019; Tran, 2022). In a Canadian society with power and privilege still in the hands of historical oppressors of trans rights (Browne & Nash, 2014; McMahon, 2024; Nash & Browne, 2021; Nick, 2018; Rau, 2014; Tremblay, 2019a, 2019b), is it possible at this time to improve trans students' well-being? Particularly when there has been no significant effort by

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<sup>173</sup>The value of focusing on well-being (in particular that of groups such as trans students, who experience harassment) is still contested in many schools, with anti-bullying initiatives even rejected as “propaganda” by some school employees (Shelton et al., 2020). There is not space here to examine the objections to schools' focus on well-being, particularly when it involves support for marginalized groups. However, it is the position of this dissertation that it is valuable for schools to monitor and support students' well-being. Based on the evidence that students' well-being is an important factor in their ability to complete their education and develop into healthy, well-adjusted adults (Moffa et al., 2016; Peter et al., 2017; Poteat et al., 2013).

Canadian society over a period of more than ten years showing significant disparity (Peter et al., 2021; Randolph et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2020; Taylor & Peter, 2011b; Wernick et al., 2017)?

The position of this dissertation is that improvement is possible. The larger social change needed bears the bulk of responsibility for creating a safe and healthy environment. An environment in which schools can finally be mandated to make the changes the literature shows are so clearly necessary (Taylor & Peter, 2011b). Within this process, the tools and oversight needed to be effective cannot come from the same place as it has for the last ten years and more. This knowledge holds the mark of its creators (Code, 1991). Feminist epistemologies suggest people holding power and privilege cannot effectively imagine a future where their influence is finally and irrefutably erased.

Trans students should be taken as the firm arbitrators of their experiences (Liou & Literat, 2020) without question. Online spaces may provide an opportunity for empowerment (Eli, 2018). In a society still dominated by cisgender people for the foreseeable future,<sup>174</sup> trans youth might achieve improved well-being by access to community and spaces that help them imagine a different future (Baig, 2021; Eli, 2018; Gentile et al., 2017). This dissertation does not aim to dispense with efforts to support trans youth and their well-being in more practical terms (largely outlined in previous sections) but also to offer an alternative pragmatic view of the current circumstances. While educators and researchers work to make change, let them imagine trans joy (Holloway, 2023), the agency and freedom of a feminist world. A world which honors their intersecting identities and the ways they shape each other.

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<sup>174</sup>Not only because of the balance of power, but the naturalization of those categories.

**Research Question 2: If [Trans students in Canadian schools are not provided the same safety, security, and well-being as their cisgender peers] what factors contribute to better experiences and outcomes?**

**Parent Support**

Parent support is outside of schools' control but should still be considered as a factor in outcome variables. Trans students have no control over whether their relatives are supportive of their identity (and it is unfortunately common for trans youth to have parents who are unsupportive or even unsafe; Campbell et al., 2022; Davy & Cordoba, 2020; Factor & Rothblum, 2008; Fish et al., 2020). For a trans student with an unsafe or unsupportive home, the safety of the school environment becomes even more important. Connectedness to school may also hold more value than students who do not have a strong bond to their family and/or community life to support their well-being and safety.

**Queer Visibility and Queer Curriculum**

The second and third prospective protective factors, queer visibility and queer curriculum, are more promising. Visibility and curriculum are to some extent intertwined, as the former can naturally result from the latter.<sup>175</sup> Accordingly, they are discussed below both specifically, and with reference to the overlapping points.

Both queer visibility and queer curriculum have been identified by previous research as urgently needed in school environments (e.g., Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Kuhlemeier et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2015; Wright-Maley et al., 2016). For the former, queer visibility in schools

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<sup>175</sup>For example, a special class series covering the contributions of transgender people in history would also make trans people a visible part of the school environment.

would be a much-needed counterpart to the increasing but often negative visibility of trans people in the media and political forums (Neary, 2018). Incorporating queer visibility in schools also may come with its drawbacks. If there is not sufficient time, resources or teachers devoted to integrating queer visibility (or similarly, queer curriculum) it may prompt negative backlash or reactions that could cause 2SLGBTQIA+ students to be increasingly targeted for violence (for example, see Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2019; Schey, 2019). This could be seen as a barrier to queer visibility or curriculum, and teachers or advocates may encounter institutional objections which point to the challenges of incorporating a change while resisting the significant investment needed to do so safely and effectively.

It may be necessary in the future for queer visibility and/or curriculum to be presented as a human rights issue, as other efforts to support trans people in Canada have had to be in the past (Egale Canada, 2016; Gentile et al., 2017; Peter & Taylor, 2017). Without such framing, schools may still fail even to acknowledge the existence of trans people. Which naturally furthers the naturalization of cissexist and gender essentialist frameworks (and isolates trans students; Mikulec & Miller, 2017; Murray, 2011).

Prosocial teaching (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009) and teacher education on 2SLGBTQIA+ issues (Kearns et al., 2017; Rands, 2009) can improve school environments for 2SLGBTQIA+ students. Trans students in Canada have specifically and repeatedly asked for Canadian teachers to be better educated about gender and transphobia (Peter & Taylor, 2017; Taylor et al., 2020; Taylor & Peter, 2011a, 2011b; Veale et al., 2015; Veale et al., 2017b).

Curriculum inclusive of trans people does not have to be explicitly around the issues of social justice and identity. To normalize a consciousness of diversity, references to trans people

can be worked into the lessons of health classes and other curricula (e.g., grammar) as a casual reference to the existence of trans communities (Martino et al., 2022a). Some educators also caution that treating 2SLGBTQIA+ curriculum inclusion as 'optional' can do more harm than good. It may render youth who choose to use that part of the curriculum visible in a negative way (Schey, 2019) while the effect on the overall learning for the class (many of whom may not use the options) might be minimal. There is increasing interest in creating engaging tools for educators and students (e.g., online games; Keenan, 2017; Miles & Jenkins, 2017). Teachers or schools could share their own best practices for covering gender in the classroom developed 'on the fly' (Mangin, 2018; Mangin, 2022; Meyer et al., 2016). Incorporating content about trans people into mandatory curriculum might be better received if it is creative, or follows a previous example delivered in a school setting.

However, for teachers to craft and deliver queer curriculum, they must also have their own education on 2SLGBTQIA+ populations. At present this is sorely lacking (Case & Amand, 2014; Schneider & Dimito, 2008). There are also existing curricula for other disciplines such as social work.<sup>176</sup> The efforts to develop courses in these areas could serve as the basis for the sorely needed education for future teachers (if resources for course development were a barrier to incorporating gender education). Teacher-educators have also found that curriculum on 2SLGBTQIA+ topics can help raise the awareness of future educators about violence directed at those groups (Masinga et al., 2020). Which can in turn make these teachers more likely to

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<sup>176</sup>As increasingly populations who serve trans people, particularly youth, recognize the need to be fluent in gender issues (Kia et al., 2023).

intervene in incidents of transphobic violence (Kosciw et al., 2008; Kosciw et al., 2009) and do so effectively.

### *Hiring Trans Staff and Teachers*

It is important to note here that another way to increase queer visibility (and specifically, trans visibility), which is training and hiring more trans staff and teachers. There are two valuable potential outcomes to this path. First, if the teacher chooses to disclose their identity at school<sup>177</sup> that teacher could be a visible and familiar representative of the trans community for the students. Having a visible trans person as a possible role model and ally would be valuable for trans students (Allen et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2021).

However, the decision to disclose identity is an individual one, and schools should not have any role in whether a teacher or staff member discloses. Additionally, trans educators whose workplace and/or students know of their identity have been targets of violence and disrespect (Ullman, 2020). Under these circumstances it is not clear if there would be benefits or harm for the trans students in that school environment. If it were permissible for persistent violence to be directed at a trans staff member or teacher, it is likely that trans students in that school would also face violence.

The second benefit of having trans teachers and/or staff would be the potential for their experiences to help shape the school's actions on supporting and protecting trans students (Seelman, 2014; Seelman et al., 2012). Teachers who are transgender have also reflected on the importance of their experiences in how they navigate discussions of gender in the classroom

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<sup>177</sup>Though this is not a decision for all trans people, some of whom may be visibly identified by others as a trans person regardless of their own wishes (Brett, 2024).

(Keenan, 2017) and would likely be valuable in developing curriculum or efforts to increase queer visibility in the school environment (Mikulec & Miller, 2017; Miller, 2016; Shelton, 2018). The presence of a respectful environment for a queer or trans educator would also create an environment more likely to be safe for trans students. This respectful environment would also promote their belonging and well-being through rules and structures which now must change to properly reflect an adult worker's rights and needs.<sup>178</sup>

### **Negatively Related Variables**

Verbal abuse and anti-LGBTQ\* [sic]<sup>179</sup> language have an inverse relationship to mean school safety, school belonging and well-being for trans students. Other research suggests students are justified in these views. At present, trans students feel they cannot rely on teachers to intervene when verbal abuse (anti-2SLGBTQ\* or otherwise) is directed at them. Or they feel teachers could worsen (Bauer, 2002; Kosciw et al., 2009; Peter et al., 2021) or actively contribute to the victimization (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Loutzenheiser, 2015; McGuire, 2010). Teachers may fail to support trans students when needed even if they recognize the need to do so (Swanson & Gettinger, 2016). Not all teachers do recognize the need (Masinga et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2016a; Taylor et al., 2016b), even while students contemporary to their work in education indicate a high need for support (Peter et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2020; Ullman, 2022; Veale et al., 2015).

However, trans students consistently call for teacher intervention (Taylor et al., 2020; Veale et al., 2015) and/or express outrage that teachers fail to intervene in instances of

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<sup>178</sup>An area still in heavy need of improvement in Canada; but this represents another direction from which to push for change (Baker & Lucas, 2017; Bauer et al., 2011; Fogarty & Zheng, 2018).

<sup>179</sup>See Footnote 53.

transphobic violence (Peter et al., 2021). Moreover, teachers are more likely to intervene when there is a clear policy indicating that verbal violence (and anti-2SLGBTQIA+ violence in particular) are not acceptable in the school environment (Day et al., 2020).

Such policies also support teachers' confidence in addressing harassment. The complex history of trans issues (and the broader 2SLGBTQIA+ precedents) in Canadian school environments (and abroad; Morgan & Taylor, 2019) can give pause to well-meaning educators (Kelly & Brandes, 2001; Kelly, 1986; Mikulec & Miller, 2017; Russell, 2010; Schneider & Dimito, 2008; Shelton et al., 2020) as well as the current political milieu (Ramsay, 2019; Randolph et al., 2008; Simes, 2023; Tran, 2022). Even one teacher explicitly showing allyship by actively preventing verbal violence could help make 2SLGBTQIA+ students less likely to miss days of school (Seelman et al., 2012).

Clear and unambiguous guidelines for intervention against transphobic behaviour in schools (as well as practical supports such as increased numbers of teachers and training) could improve teachers' experience of the situation as well. Many teachers are distressed by witnessing discrimination against trans students (Kearns et al., 2017) or are overwhelmed with the potential of doing harm (Martino et al., 2022a). However, teachers often also recognize the immense harm of doing nothing or contributing to silencing burgeoning discussions on gender and respect for individual identities (Randolph et al., 2008; Simes, 2023; Stelmach et al., 2021).

### **Nonsignificant Covariates**

Finally, it is noteworthy that three of the covariates included in the analysis did not have a significant relationship to most outcome variables. Disclosure (being "out"), academic self-efficacy, and participation. Participation was significantly related to school belonging. Academic

self-efficacy was related to the scales of well-being. Being 'out' was significantly related to psychological well-being. More research may be needed to explore these relationships and establish more definitively the connection or lack of connection with the outcome variables.

Based on the prior literature, trans students were expected to rate the safety of their school lower than other groups from personal experience (Day et al., 2020; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007). In reference to ratings of school safety, this means that whether a student is openly identified as LGBTQ\* [sic]<sup>180</sup> did not make a difference to how safe they perceive their school to be for LGBTQ\* students and their families, or for trans students specifically. This suggests that ratings of school safety for the LGBTQ\* community and their relatives are not influenced (at least primarily) by direct experience such as being the target of anti- LGBTQ\* violence.

Both average ratings, for all groups, are below 'somewhat safe,' and this homogenous impression of safety suggests that negativity toward LGBTQ\* identities is so openly expressed in schools that students do not have to be directly targeted for their own LGBTQ\* identity to know about it. Students who have not disclosed their identity or do not have such an identity do not differ in how safe they believe the school to be, or how much they feel they belong there. The literature concerning 2SLGBTQIA+ students shows students do not have to be "out" to witness significant transphobia, homophobia and biphobia (Peter et al., 2021; Peter et al., 2017; Peter & Taylor, 2017; Peter et al., 2016; Peter et al., 2015a; Peter et al., 2015b). This might naturally mean 2SLGBTQIA+ students do not feel they belong even if they are not a target of direct discrimination.

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<sup>180</sup>See Footnote 53.

Academic self-efficacy bore no relationship to safety, but more concerningly had no positive relationship with school belonging. If the purpose of being in school is to develop skills as a student, the sense of belonging within the student body does not appear to reflect that value. Academic efficacy did have a positive relationship to well-being, which suggests avenues for fostering well-being through support for academics of trans students if more comprehensive supports are not available. There may still be a connection with school belonging not visible in these analyses, as findings from post-secondary student populations suggest that lack of belonging will eventually affect academic self-efficacy (Blankenau et al., 2023). Similarly, participation had a significant relationship only with school belonging, but the relationship may simply not be visible in the direction of analyses. Improving safety would naturally promote participation.

### **Research Question 1 and 2: Combined Interpretation**

Trans students are not safe, and they are in a school environment that does not reflect them as part of a community of students (nor by extension, part of society as all students learn to conceptualize it). This makes it no surprise that many trans students are simply not doing well socially, emotionally and psychologically.

These results confirm the work of previous studies which have found that trans youth are less safe than their peers (for example, Peter et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2020; Veale et al., 2015). Trans students' mental health is negatively impacted by being in environments where they are unsafe and stigmatized (Kelleher, 2009; Veale et al., 2017a; Veale et al., 2017b). However, these analyses further the picture of trans students' safety by illuminating the factors that support and maintain such an environment.

What allows these attitudes to co-exist with an environment ostensibly aimed at supporting and teaching youth in Canada, particularly when the country has recently passed protections (Cossman, 2018) for trans citizens? Transphobic abuse may be to some extent integrated into the pervasive gendered abuse (based on normative expectations of gender) interwoven into Canadian society and many others (Andres & Adamuti-Trache, 2008).

Anti-discrimination training for teachers and administrators within schools may not be detailed enough to include how to distinguish between gendered abuse in other forms and transphobia (McGuire, 2010; Shields, 2008). Educators may also be unaware of the heightened levels of abuse facing trans youth (Taylor et al., 2015; Worthen, 2013). They may also overlook the impact abuse can have on the well-being of trans students, due to a lack of supports other students have (even LGBTQ+ students; White et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2005).

It is complex to examine how trans students are targeted for abuse, when so many other facets of identity are interwoven with their daily experiences (Taube & Mussap, 2020; Williams et al., 2017). Canadian schools simply do not devote the time and resources necessary for educators to learn how current generations of trans students are treated by the world, and how to effectively support them (Allen et al., 2020; Kearns et al., 2017; Keenan, 2017; Kelly & Brandes, 2001; Mangin, 2022; Martino et al., 2022b; Masinga et al., 2020). Without these supports, trans students are unlikely to be made safe, or to feel they belong in their schools.

There is evidence spanning more than ten years (for a direct comparison, see Peter et al., 2021) to show trans students (and more broadly, 2SLGBTQIA+ students) are not treated well in Canada. Specifically, in Canadian schools (Darwin, 2020; Rushton et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2020) where they are dependent on the state for their welfare. Taken in context with the

literature, the dissertation analyses seem to show that trans students' safety and well-being is not genuinely important to Canadian government.

Protections are passed on paper, but little action is taken to enforce the human rights of trans students in their schools. Negative attitudes toward trans people are still relatively common in Canada (Browne & Nash, 2014; Tremblay, 2015). Trans students continue to rely largely on allyship, self-advocacy and peer support in their school years, with administration and teachers ranging from resistant to supportive (Ashley, 2024; Iskander, 2018; Nash & Browne, 2021; Stehr et al., 2024; Taylor et al., 2016b; Taylor et al., 2022). Moreover, in many provinces, the government is actively moving to limit their rights (for example, see the actions around trans students in Saskatchewan's public school system; Randolph et al., 2008; Simes, 2023). The Canadian government must decide if it is willing to protect the human rights of trans students over the objections of parents and provinces (Fish et al., 2020) who refuse to accept the overwhelming evidence of their existence and rights. At present, Canadian schools do little to even acknowledge trans peoples' existence.

Canadian schools largely exclude 2SLGBTQIA+ topics.<sup>181</sup> This is unfair to students. 2SLGBTQIA+ students deserve to see the family life and relationships they might have represented and normalized.<sup>182</sup> Cishet (cisgender heterosexual) students also deserve the chance to learn about the reality of the world. To exclude trans people (or other 2SLGBTQIA+ people) from curriculum is simply not accurate. Cishet people are not the only people in the

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<sup>181</sup>28% of students state they have no LGBTQ\* content in their classrooms; even in classes such as Family Life, 36% of students said their class had no mention of LGBTQ\* people.

<sup>182</sup>As well as normalizing for cishet students the presence of 2SLGBTQIA+ families in society.

world. All students fail to have an adequate education if some groups are written out of existence.

All students deserve to feel they belong in their school and the broader fabric of society. Society already fails to offer trans people a safe environment (Arayasirikul & Wilson, 2019; Marcellin et al., 2013). The school environment likely contributes to why many trans students choose not to be open ("out") about their identity (only 32% were open about their identity with everyone at school), which further artificially reduces the diversity evident in Canadian schools' learning environments. This is a worrying proportion of students who are not able to be open about who they are in their day-to-day life and might not be able to access the care needed to function in a society that also stigmatizes them (Namaste, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c). This artificially homogenous environment fails all students by not preparing them for the world.

It is easy to interpret this lack of belonging as a problem primarily affecting the ability of trans students to integrate and feel at home in their schools. However, an environment that does not teach about gender diversity or support students in being open about their gender also gives a false impression about the world outside of school. Regardless of the attitudes of individual students, cisgender heterosexual students are not learning about the world in a way that reflects the reality of the people in it. Increasingly many trans people are open about their gender, and this reflects not only the reality of the world but also the conceptions of gender within the Indigenous societies of 'Canada'/Turtle Island (Allen et al., 2020).

The current school environment does not foster the opportunity to develop accepting attitudes to diversity by interacting with people of different groups (Glasford & Calcagno, 2012; Norton & Herek, 2013; Tadlock et al., 2017). Nor does it simply inform students of the reality of

groups that differ from them. Many students' home life may be shaped by parents who try to contradict the existence of gender diversity (Ashley, 2024; Bouris et al., 2010; Fish et al., 2020; Grossman et al., 2021). This would make school the only space where they have an opportunity to learn that people exist who do not conform to the cissexist binary.

The lack of safety and security explains trans students' significantly lower social well-being. In a school environment where transphobic slurs are regularly expressed with impunity, it would be difficult for trans students to judge what social connections are safe and genuine (and trans and nonbinary youth often report being socially excluded; Peter et al., 2021).

Trans students' significantly lower scores of emotional and psychological well-being are also explained by their perceived lack of safety and security in school.<sup>183</sup> It is natural to feel the emotional impact of isolation (Day et al., 2020; Murray, 2011), both from the available social groups and from the absence of one's group in the curriculum used to teach about the world.

Importantly, all groups rated trans students' safety low, which means that all social groups (cisgender students, cisgender LGBTQ\* students, and trans students themselves) know that trans students are a target of abuse. The fact that the mean ratings of safety were low to such an extent across groups suggests this abuse is normalized. This is inconsistent with the original expectations of these analyses. Trans students were expected to rate the safety of LGBTQ\* [sic]<sup>184</sup> people at their school lower than other groups due to firsthand experience. However, all

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<sup>183</sup>Perceived refers here to the specific measure in the survey (students' own ratings of the safety of their school). The use of 'perceived' is not intended to suggest that this perception is incorrect, and the position of this dissertation is that trans students are the best authority on their own experiences.

<sup>184</sup>See Footnote 53.

students rating safety similarly low suggests that the abuse directed or threatened against trans students is normalized to some extent because all students are aware of it.

The low safety scores do not necessarily mean that students find this acceptable. The results of the First and Second School Climate showed cisgender heterosexual students increasingly disliked homophobia (Peter et al., 2021; Taylor & Peter, 2011a). Homophobia is an expression of discrimination complexly intertwined with transphobia as well. Trends of students being aware of spaces in their schools as unsafe for LGBTQ\* people have also been similar for LGBTQ\* students and cis het students in the larger results of the Second School Climate Survey (Peter et al., 2021).

However, it is not clear that students who are aware of these spaces being unsafe would necessarily agree that they should be made safer. Ratings of safety capture the overall awareness of the social environment. But the survey question did not ask the respondent's opinion on whether their school should be made safe for trans students. Some of these students may be aware of the lack of safety but contribute to it and/or find it acceptable. Students were not asked in this survey to disclose whether they engaged in homophobia and/or transphobic harassment of other students. Future research could explore this measure and its' relationship to safety ratings as well as student opinions of who should be safe in their school.

The effects of lacking safety and security in their learning environment could go far beyond the school years. Other research has shown that the school years are an important time to acquire developmentally appropriate skills (Bowers et al., 2015; Lemberger, 2010; Villares, 2011). Failing to develop as peers do could have a cumulative effect that leaves trans students at a disadvantage later in life.

While arguably it could be said there are limits to schools' influence on students' well-being, providing an environment which does not include verbal abuse or slurs against students' identities is a very low minimum standard to meet. Eliminating these from the school environment is an essential first step toward bringing trans students' well-being up to the level of their peers. Some aspects of well-being are outside of the school environment. However, mandatory attendance in an unsafe school environment will contribute to more negative well-being scores overall and could contribute to harm where risk factors are also present outside of school (e.g., unsupportive family).

**Research Question 3: Which intersections of identity result in the best and worst outcomes [for trans students in Canadian schools]?**

The third research question of this dissertation compared the outcomes of racialized trans students to non-racialized students. Twenty-three percent of trans students ( $N = 86$ ) indicated at least one racial identity other than white (solely or in addition to a white racial identity) which was defined for these analyses as the racialized student group.

To recap, a comparison of racialized and non-racialized trans students' outcomes from the Second School Climate Survey showed no significant difference on outcome variables (safety, school belonging, and well-being) when trans students with racialized identities were compared to those with only a white racial identity. This outcome was surprising. There is a well-established history of racial inequality within the Canadian education system (for example, see Henry, 2021; Young, 2015) as well as within 2SLGBTQIA+ spaces (Whitfield et al., 2014). The expectation based on this literature was that racialized trans students would be affected more negatively than other trans students.

Race can be a very visible minoritized identity within Canada. It is common for trans people with racialized identities to face more discrimination than white trans people (Kosciw et al., 2009; Logie & Rwigema, 2014), particularly trans women and femmes (Gamarel et al., 2020; Jefferson et al., 2013). There is a strong basis to expect racialized trans students to experience discrimination differently than their white counterparts, even within 2SLGBTQIA+ communities (Giwa & Greensmith, 2012).

However, because all trans students in the Second School Climate Survey scored low on outcomes such as safety and well-being, the negative effect of being a trans student in this environment might overwhelm any smaller effects from racialization. The differences based on racialization might also be less pronounced in this sample because the students grouped as racialized were diverse. Students spanned racial identities whose treatment might vary enough to disguise any effects of racialization.<sup>185</sup> In addition, the racialized versus white groups in this sample were based on self-reported racial identities rather than whether the student would consider themselves a 'visible minority' based on race.

Within racialized groups there can be a significant difference in the discrimination a given person faces based on the shade of their skin within their racial group.<sup>186</sup> Similarly, their treatment might differ depending whether they are visually identified by most people as a racialized minority (Albuja et al., 2018) particularly if the person is biracial. The Second School Climate survey found that racialized LGBTQ\* [sic]<sup>187</sup> students' safety and experiences of

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<sup>185</sup>For example, if the students in the sample differed enough in their visible appearance where some might be viewed as racialized, and others viewed as white ('white-passing').

<sup>186</sup>'Colorism,' which can occur even within a person's own racial/ethnic community (Dixon & Telles, 2017)

<sup>187</sup>See Footnote 53.

discrimination did vary (Peter et al., 2021), but it is possible that variation among these difference patterns in the trans group (or the significantly smaller sample size, which could be more easily influenced by individual differences) could obscure a comparative difference.

These and other limitations could result in a false negative ('Type II error') where the test shows no difference between the two groups, but a difference does exist. It is also possible that the nature of the differences between the groups is not captured by the measures from the Second School Climate Survey. The binary measures of safety (yes/no) for example, would not capture the degree to which the student felt unsafe, the frequency, or the nature of the acts that make them feel unsafe. More specific questions about safety, larger sample sizes and other suggestions to address limitations are further discussed in a later section.

**Research Question 4: Have trans students' experiences of safety and support in their school environment changed between the First and Second National School Climate Surveys?**

Comparing the First and Second School Climate Surveys offered a unique opportunity to track the effect of formal protections for trans people in Canada. Across roughly ten years, there is a great potential for change in society. Bill C-16 was a particularly visible marker of the advances Canadians might expect to see in the rights of trans students.

The results of the comparison were disappointing to hopes of progress. Trans students' odds of feeling unsafe at school have not changed between the First and Second School Climate Surveys. Nor have the average number of school areas which trans students considered unsafe. Finally, despite the many Canadians who have worked to make schools a welcoming space for trans students since the First School Climate Survey things have not changed for the better. In the Second School Climate Survey, trans students felt significantly less school belonging

compared to the First School Climate Survey. Each of the main comparative outcome measures will be discussed in more detail below.

### **Safety**

Despite changes made to support safety, trans students' perceptions of areas of their school as unsafe did not change between the first and second school surveys. Anti-LGBTQ\* [sic]<sup>188</sup> language and verbal abuse were both significantly related to this outcome, which indicates that in a fundamental and important way schools have not changed. Abusive language and slurs against LGBTQ\* communities are still common (Peter et al., 2021), perhaps as a reflection of broader social norms which still allow this in North America (Gentile et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2021).

Unfortunately, this outcome is consistent with the literature. The progression of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community between 2007/09 and 2019/20 did not mean that trans people gained social rights and respect even on par with their LGBQ\* identity peers (Asakura, 2019; Baig, 2021; Gentile et al., 2017).<sup>189</sup> This pattern of trans people being left behind in movements as '2SLGBTQIA+ rights' ostensibly advance is not unique to Canada, as it can be seen in a number of countries across the world (Badali, 2019; Browne et al., 2011; Upadhyay, 2021).

Despite greater visibility for trans people and gains such as Bill C-16 offering explicit protection, the fact that minors under the care of the state feel unsafe in Canadian schools shows us the true state of trans rights: protection under the law does not keep young people safe (Cossman, 2018; Cossman & Katri, 2017). Even more concerning, the odds of feeling unsafe

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<sup>188</sup>See Footnote 53.

<sup>189</sup>Who still face their own barriers and opposition in Canadian Society (Ecker et al., 2015; Gonzalez et al., 2021).

at school have not changed for trans students. Across a period of ten years and much-lauded progress in 2SLGBTQIA+ rights, trans students have not gained in the most essential way: feeling safe where they are required to spend the bulk of their weekday hours.

Trans students thoroughly understand what it means to be unsafe (Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007). They know explicitly what it is like to be taunted and ridiculed, threatened or subjected to both physical and sexual violence (Taube & Mussap, 2020; Taylor et al., 2020; Veale et al., 2015; Wernick et al., 2017). Safety is interpreted here as the ability to participate in all classes and school activities without being molested either verbally or physically, and without receiving consequences (e.g., detention, exclusion from activities) based on identity or self-expression.

Framing the safety outcomes as perception would allow those responsible for students' safety (adults such as administrators and teachers) to frame the issue raised by these results as how to make students 'feel' safe rather than how to ensure they are safe. The difference in this messaging is subtle but would likely appeal to school officials whether consciously or unconsciously. Most educators could be understandably reluctant to believe students are unsafe at school (and it could be distressing; for example, see Stelmach et al., 2021). Trans students' lack of safety would also be particularly difficult to see if the educators in question do not share the students' identities and experience (Kearns et al., 2017; Mangin, 2022).

Differences in background and changing social norms could make some student interactions less visible (such as when educators may not be aware of transphobia in their schools; Martino et al., 2022a; Martino et al., 2022b). Educators also may struggle with how to

approach social justice in their working environment (Kelly & Brandes, 2001) or see support for trans students as representative of a controversial issue (Morgan & Taylor, 2019; Ullman, 2022)

The visibility of trans students and/or threats to their safety, as well as the perceived 'controversial' nature of discussing trans identities (such as trans people) in schools, could repress efforts to support trans students. Recognizing outcomes about safety in this dissertation as a genuine reflection of the school environment may help to combat these barriers.

### **School Belonging**

Despite the passage of ten years and a bill formally protecting their rights in Canada, trans youth in the Second School Climate Survey did not feel a greater sense of belonging in their school. On the contrary, they felt significantly less school belonging than the trans students in the First School Climate Survey.

This outcome is counter to the expectations most Canadians might have. 2SLGBTQIA+ rights are generally thought to have advanced between 2007/09 and 2019/20 (Browne & Nash, 2014). This outcome indicates advances for trans people in Canada have not been unidirectional, a finding supported by the literature (Gentile et al., 2017; Randolph et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2020; Wernick et al., 2017) which shows that often trans people are left behind in advances attributed to 2SLGBTQIA+ communities.

This outcome should not be oversimplified, as there is nuance in the differences in school belonging. In the Second School Climate Survey, LGBQ+ boys indicated they felt lower school belonging than trans students (whose sense of school belonging was already lower than their cisgender peers', and that of cisgender LGBQ+ girls). Cisgender LGBQ+ boys' lack of school

belonging may provide insight into what has changed between the First and Second School Climate Surveys. Trans students are subject to the unwelcoming cisnormative expectations of Canadian society which color their school environment (e.g., DeGagne, 2021), and by binary expectations of gendered behaviour more broadly. The difference in their school belonging compared to cisgender students is not unexpected, because they are navigating an environment which still practices beliefs that tacitly exclude and harm them. However, cisgender LGBTQ\* boys' lack of belonging may indicate that the gendered expectations placed on cisgender boys are sharply at odds with the experience of being queer to the extent that they feel similarly excluded. There is support in the literature for this possibility.

While LGBTQ\* men and women as adults are both marginalized in different ways, discrimination against them is strongly related to endorsement of existing gender ideologies (Gulevich et al., 2023). This may extend to creating imagined, exaggerated threats that will arise if the gender nonconforming masses are granted rights (Cossman, 2018; DeGagne, 2021; Gedro & Mizzi, 2014).<sup>190</sup> Gender ideology here refers the belief in the entrenched inequalities between (assumed cisgender) men and women; the current system of gendering people as men and women, the attached roles, and the correctness of both (Wharton, 2005). (Cisgender) men are more likely than (cisgender) women to endorse gender ideologies because it provides them a more favourable social role (Bosson et al., 2019).

Endorsement of gender ideologies is often correlated with hostile types of sexism which denigrate women who do not conform but also men who are seen as behaving in unmasculine ways (Kántás & Kovacs, 2022) such as LGBTQ\* men. Gender ideologies include highly prescriptive

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<sup>190</sup>As well as factors such as gender expression (Jacobson et al., 2015; Kuper et al., 2012; Petchesky, 2008).

beliefs about (cis)"men" and (cis)"women" and how they must behave (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). Students in Canadian schools are aware of prescriptive gender beliefs (Andres & Adamuti-Trache, 2008) and use these to help understand their social context (Horn & Sinno, 2014). However, gender prescriptive views of girls/women may be counterbalanced to some extent, because the effects of gendered discrimination in limiting the potential of girls and women are well-established (Frizzell & Pammatt, 1996; Jones & Myhill, 2004).

If there are not similar efforts to offset entrenched gender ideologies and their prescriptive views towards boys/men, this could explain how young LGBTQ\* men feel lower school belonging. Being a LGBTQ\* boy is at odds with established gender ideologies which traditionally view men as exclusively heterosexual (Montgomery & Stewart, 2012). If boys in secondary schools more commonly accept gender ideologies, masculine peer groups would be markedly unwelcoming to anyone who does not fulfill the prescribed role.

Despite laudable action taken after the First School Climate Survey (Peter et al., 2021), the lower school belonging felt by trans students in the Second School Climate Survey suggests that the school environment and/or the broader Canadian social climate failed trans students. Likely in part because their gender identities are not respected or reflected in the spaces around them (Allen et al., 2020; Day et al., 2020; Fish et al., 2020; Fisher, 2004a, 2004b; Randolph et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2020; Veale et al., 2017a; Veale et al., 2017b) but also because their school experiences noticeably lack input from their own generational view of the world (Maher & Earl, 2021).

In short, the contrast between the First and Second School Climate Surveys may not be solely due to the actual school environment at either point. Rather, trans students may show

less school belonging in the Second School Climate Survey because there is a more precise division of trans and cis gender groups. It is possible that in 2019/20 more trans students have access to the language and understanding to identify themselves. Greater visibility for the trans and nonbinary community could allow students to identify how they were part of it (Greenberg et al., 2017), where previously they might not have had the knowledge to do so until later in life. This would mean that rather than having less school belonging in the Second School Climate Survey, there are more trans students identifying themselves within the survey, and the division in school belonging more precisely reflects the state of school belonging.

The smaller proportion of trans students in the First School Climate Survey provides some support for this, as does the greater visibility of trans communities in 2019/20 (McBride & Neary, 2021; Shelton, 2018). Trans, nonbinary and otherwise trans youth are coming out earlier (Kjaraan & Kristinsdóttir, 2015; Kuhlemeier et al., 2021; Mangin, 2018; McBride & Neary, 2021). There is increasing visibility in media and social life of adult trans people (Brett, 2024; Keenan, 2017). Young trans people may not share their identity with everyone (Kennedy, 2022), for example parents. But they are more likely to align themselves with the trans community in 2019/20 compared to a decade prior (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2018).

### **Connections to Theory**

The three theories which inform this dissertation (feminist theory, intersectionality theory, and queer theory) are not mutually exclusive. While each contribute specific insights and understanding, areas of overlap are addressed primarily in the section which appears first.

## Feminist Theory

The connections to feminist theory discussed here refer to the definition of 'feminist theory' given in the earlier theory section.<sup>191</sup>

In this dissertation, feminist theory is useful in breaking down the difficulties faced by people whose perspectives are not a part of creating the environment they inhabit (hooks, 2000a, 2000b). It also calls for a critical examination of the role of gender and/or gender roles in Canadian schools. Feminist theory has "sought to destabilize androcentric, mainstream thinking" (Longino, 1993, p. 201). However, there is typically backlash when mainstream thinking on gender is challenged (e.g., Binard, 2014; Boyd, 2013; Vipond, 2015; Walby, 1997). Positioning trans youth as the epistemological authority in this dissertation helps fulfil the feminist goal of disrupting mainstream thinking on gender. The outcomes in brief are that trans students have lower reported safety, well-being and connection in their school life than their peers.<sup>192</sup> Feminist theory provides a framework for understanding how these results will be received.

Feminist theorists have recognized how entrenched gender (and gender roles) are in the power dynamics of society (de Beauvoir, 1953). This provides context for how the views of trans students might be received. Past movements which challenged gender dynamics have been met with dismissal, or efforts to undercut and discredit the group making the challenge (e.g.,

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<sup>191</sup>Feminist theory is too broad an expression to be contained in a single paper. Feminist theories are complex, numerous, and interconnected (for example, see discussions in Bhavnani, 1993; Code, 1991, 2002; Wylie, 2012). For a specific discussion of feminist theories see Code (1991, 2002); Collins (2000); (Lykke, 2010; Mohanty, 2003).<sup>191</sup>

<sup>192</sup>This echoes the literature on the topic. Other trans students' experience reflects a similar lack of safety (Allen et al., 2020; Marx & Kettrey, 2016), well-being (Asakura, 2019; Hatchel et al., 2018), and school belonging (Loutzenheiser, 2015; McGuire, 2010) relatively unnoticed by the adults (Martino et al., 2022b) peers or educators (Liou & Literat, 2020) around them.

Binard, 2014; Friedan, 1963; Tobias, 1997). This suggest that the reception of the views of trans students, as stark as they are, will be met with attempts at dismissal. This may be focused on their gender as it has in previous movement. For example, suggesting that if they (trans students) were a proper, respectable (cis)gendered member of society these problems would not exist (de Beauvoir, 1953; Tobias, 1997). Feminist theory and the history of feminist movements tell us that it is reasonable to expect efforts to dismiss trans students' experiences. Or to suggest they are not capable of contributing as other groups are. For example, because of their youth.

The idea that youth engage with the world on par with other groups should not need support. however, their marginalization means it is sometimes demanded (Oswell, 2012). Women and other marginalized groups have been similarly dismissed as not having the same complex engagement with the world as the groups in power (Bosson et al., 2019).<sup>193</sup> 2SLGBTQIA+ youth actively engage with their surroundings and navigate adverse circumstances, often frustrated at their own powerlessness (Robinson, 2018).

Despite the potential for their views to be dismissed, standpoint feminism suggests trans students are likely to have a more complete picture of the circumstances in Canadian schools.<sup>194</sup> Feminist theory suggests the perspectives of trans youth will actually hold unique insights that adults and cisgender people (as respectively privileged populations) would not be able to see (Dewar, 1993; Harding, 1993; Kenny & Kinsella, 1997). This is because subordinate

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<sup>193</sup>Ironically, this offensive dismissal (often used as a pretext to deny women rights) is often termed 'infantilizing' them women by treating them as youth (Else-Quest & Hyde, 2018). While youth activists have decried the same dismissive treatment from groups (including feminists and intended allies) toward their work (Liou & Literat, 2020).

<sup>194</sup>Due to their disadvantaged position, where they must be aware of the circumstances of the more privileged groups as well as their own circumstances (Harding, 1993; Kenny & Kinsella, 1997; Longino, 1993).

groups are heavily affected by the actions and decisions of those in power, while those in power are less affected by those subordinate to them (Dewar, 1993). For example, adult perspectives can affect youth lives in a way that youth perspectives cannot affect adult lives (Cole, 1991).

Due to the lack of youth in research (Hawke et al., 2020), youth views are often simply unavailable. Young people are often separated out from the other spaces of society where adults interact (hooks, 2000a).<sup>195</sup> Information about youth may rely less on youth themselves (Maher & Earl, 2021), and more on ostensibly objective experts who produce 'legitimate' knowledge (Code, 1991; Eagly & Riger, 2014; hooks, 2000a; Longino, 1993; Mohanty, 2003). This makes the perspective of trans students extremely valuable. It also highlights the contribution of this dissertation in conveying a perspective which is often absent,<sup>196</sup> a concept given particular importance by feminist theorists (de Beauvoir, 1953; Hesse-Biber, 2012a; Wylie, 2012).

Feminist theory validates the contributions of youth and provides a caution about the imprint of the others who have a role in the creation of these results. It is not possible to remove an adult perspective entirely. Researchers must be conscious of how adult perspectives could overtake or devalue those of youth.<sup>197</sup> Adult researchers created the survey tool and conducted data collection for the First and Second School Climate Surveys. Which means an

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<sup>195</sup>Youth are even viewed as the possessions of adults to some degree (hooks, 2000a).

<sup>196</sup>On the basis of both gender (minoritized genders) and age (youth) less commonly seen in research.

<sup>197</sup>A common issue in intergeneration collaboration for the production of knowledge. See Liou and Literat (2020).

adult perspective naturally influences this dissertation.<sup>198</sup> Feminist theory has provided a framework for transparency and acknowledgement (Code, 1991) of this influence.

Generations of youth have been raised under adult mantras that demand they be seen but not heard, sit second to adults, hold their views until their minds are older (hooks, 2000b). It would inhibit the authentic representation of trans students' experiences to pretend this history does not exist and maintain pretensions of objectivity.<sup>199</sup> Analysis of youth data should aim to represent youths' views as accurately as possible without overwriting them with adult perspectives (Hawke et al., 2020). Feminist theorists like de Beauvoir (1953) highlight that there is no true objectivity. Particularly when there are groups oppressed compared to oppressive, there is a side to take in terms of epistemological validation. In this dissertation, the perspectives of trans students are supported as arbiters of their own experiences and valid epistemological contribution. Feminist theory dictates that this be presented as having equal value with other perspectives (Wylie, 2012).

Previous contributions to research show that trans students have been active in trying to report issues, gain support, or most notably (given the research available) air their concerns in a way that clearly indicates they expect better from their surroundings (Loutzenheiser, 2015; Peter et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2020; Taylor & Peter, 2011a; Veale et al., 2015). Using the lens of feminist theory, this dissertation views these youth as legitimate epistemological sources, whose experience is shaped by their context (Bhavnani, 1993; Hesse-Biber, 2012a).

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<sup>198</sup>Derived from feminist theory, the epistemological position of this dissertation is that there is no single objective version of knowledge (Code, 1991) available as context shapes experience (de Beauvoir, 1953). For examples of feminist interrogations of subjectivity, see Fox and Ore (2010); Gatenby and Humphries (2000).

<sup>199</sup>For further discussions on the problematic nature of claims of objectivity, see Bhavnani (1993)

If we approach trans students as an authority on their own experiences,<sup>200</sup> there are also concerning results with some of the contextual variables around the treatment of trans student in schools. Trans students were reluctant to report harassment or discrimination they received, for a variety of reasons. However, the natural inference is that the handling of reports has not been successful in stopping the harassment or discrimination.

In the Second Survey, for example, more than half of trans students (57%) felt concern for their safety if they reported harassment. Viewing trans students as the experts of their own experience,<sup>201</sup> it would make sense to conclude that trans students have experience with reporting which has led them to conclude it will make them less safe.

School officials who create the guidelines for reporting may be unaware of this perception, or even of policies for support themselves (Martino et al., 2022b). Or they may be aware and downplay their role and responsibility (Frohard-Dourlent, 2016). This would not be the only instance in which the views of the school establishment on how discrimination and harassment are addressed differ from the experiences of trans students (Bermea et al., 2018; Kuhlemeier et al., 2021; Paechter et al., 2021; Porta et al., 2017; Randolph et al., 2008; Reisner et al., 2020).

The practical consequences trans students experience for reporting could be invisible to administration. But regardless of the official narrative on addressing harassment in schools, trans students' experience is mainly that school staff will not do anything (or would not do anything effective) if they report what they are facing. Trans students should be taken seriously

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<sup>200</sup>Per the framing provided by feminist theory.

<sup>201</sup>A respect given to personhood which should be extended to all genders (de Beauvoir, 1953).

as the most reliable view ('standpoint') on the issues,<sup>202</sup> a point of view which is not necessarily available to adults (Krane, 2001; Longino, 1993).

There is a particular value to standpoint feminist on this issue in providing opposition to the instincts of the author. As the adult who is presenting these experiences, the author's first reaction was to consider whether the experiences reported might be a perception based on error. It would be easier to accept the idea that adults might have greater control over the school experiences of trans students than it appears from the data. This conclusion would mean both more effective adult care at work, and safer environments for trans students. This is an appealing idea, as an adult who believes that youth deserve protection and that adults are able to provide it. As someone in a different age group and with greater agency (than trans students) it was hard to accept that the resources at their disposal are so ineffective. While it is important to acknowledge this instinct to locate other explanations for the experience trans youth report, it is more consistent with standpoint feminist theory to simply accept the epistemological validity of trans students' experiences.

This highlights another valuable contribution of feminist theory to interpretation of the results: acknowledgement of agency. Trans students are not helpless victims.<sup>203</sup> Like adults, they should be considered 'situated embodied subjects' (de Beauvoir, 1953). This is an important consideration in interpreting the results in lower school belonging for trans students. Trans students should be given credit for the agency to undertake connections to their school if

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<sup>202</sup>As a less privileged group, they are likely to have a more accurate view than others in society whose privileged position means some aspects of reality are hidden from their view ("standpoint feminism," hooks, 2000b; Longino, 1993).

<sup>203</sup>Though it cannot be ignored that their age places them at a disadvantage in being able to procure the outcomes and protections they need (Kwon, 2013; Shelton et al., 2020; Thoreson et al., 2018).

desired.<sup>204</sup> If they are unable to feel they belong at school, compared to peers, the environment should be examined.

The identities represented and centred in the school likely represent, like society, who holds the most social power (Code, 1991, 2002; Cossman, 2018; de Beauvoir, 1953). In terms of gender, cisgender students will be represented and centred, in a way which does not put their gender at the forefront of their identity (Peter et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2020; Taylor & Peter, 2011a; Taylor et al., 2016b; Veale et al., 2015; Wernick et al., 2017). Cisgender students may have the opportunity to feel connected to their schools based on many dimensions of identity and interest. Gender, income, athletics, art, class identity, or social and political connections (Butler, 2019; Edgerton, 2010; Lehmann, 2012; Lugones, 2020) could all be points of connection. This provides a guide for how to approach trans students' belonging.

Marginalized gender groups are often considered defined and shaped by their gender beyond other attributes (de Beauvoir, 1953). This detracts from their ability to be individual and human (Code, 1991). The school connection of trans students should not focus on connections to them solely based on gender (Goldberg et al., 2019; Rands, 2009). Trans students may have a limited opportunity for connection to their school due to not being respected in their identity or reflected in their surroundings (Porta et al., 2017; Raha, 2017). While removing barriers and discrimination directed at students with trans identities, schools should aim to facilitate full expression of students' selfhood and interests in school spaces.

The challenge which trans identity offers to the accepted cishetero social order can cast the shortcomings of a binary gender organization of society into sharp relief. In this case, that

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<sup>204</sup>There should also be consideration of whether or not the avenue is available to them.

could be useful, helping cultivate a space in which challenges to other aspects of the existing school environment might emerge (for example, see themes explored in Keenan, 2017; Morrison et al., 2019; Rands, 2009; White & Jenkins, 2017). However, the inherent challenge to the status quo represented by trans acceptance could also be a factor in how trans students and their rights are received. In terms of changes made to facilitate safety, belonging, or well-being, feminist theory would suggest that any advancement could also prompt backlash.<sup>205</sup>

Trans people are seen, challenged, objectified and politicized (Norton & Herek, 2013; Tadlock et al., 2017) by the society around them. Feminist theory dictates this be understood to take place in a society where gender is an integral part of the order of power and influence, and challenges to the order are actively oppressed (Gatenby & Humphries, 2000; Hesse-Biber, 2012b; Tobias, 1997). For trans students to be safe and belong in their schools, it must be understood how they as subjects see, challenge and politicize the existing worldviews. Not just by the external view of the existence of their gender and bodies.<sup>206</sup> Rather, trans students' orientation to a dominant ideology (gender) could prime people around them in society to challenge other established structures.<sup>207</sup> Once gender as a specific and distinct category imposed externally is challenged,<sup>208</sup> challenges to other 'socionormalities' (Todd, 2023) may

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<sup>205</sup>Due to challenging an existing order of power (gender) which is far reaching in society (Bosson et al., 2019; Brettschneider et al., 2017; Brickell, 2006)

<sup>206</sup>Which trouble existing social rules and organization (Wernick et al., 2017).

<sup>207</sup>For example, colonialism (Boellstorff et al., 2014), policing of borders (Hodge et al., 2019), or sex work (Sitter et al., 2022).

<sup>208</sup>Which for trans students, is irrefutably evident from their own identity.

follow. This could mean trans youth may be the subject of backlash disproportionate to the actual advances on their rights.<sup>209</sup>

This does not mean that all trans youth or even most will naturally challenge power relations around them or aim to transform society. However, communities of trans youth are rife with views considered radical by those around them (Eli, 2018; McBride & Neary, 2021). Many adult trans people consider their trans identity as an integral part of their orientation to the world and others (Baig, 2021; Cameron, 2005; Fox & Ore, 2010; Goldin-Perschbacher, 2015; Robinson, 2020). Trans youth grow toward their own engagement with the world distinct from spaces shaped by adults (Maher & Earl, 2021) and are active in imagining different futures in the world they have been given (Schey, 2022; Wargo, 2017). They do not wait to leave school to redraw the boundaries of acceptability they have been given by previous generations. Trans students engage in activism even in secondary schools (Loutzenheiser, 2015; McBride & Neary, 2021; Taylor & Peter, 2011b; Ullman, 2022). Trans students, like many disadvantaged communities, have insights that advantaged groups do not (hooks, 2000b). Judging by the literature, they want to use these insights to shape the world differently for future generations.

Feminist theory is a natural alignment for the radical reimagining of belonging for trans youth. The history of feminism shows the ground-shaking effect of breaking of a rule of establishment (such as rejecting biological essentialism and binary sex roles as an excuse for the oppression of women as a 'second' class; de Beauvoir, 1953). A challenge can shatter the intricate social relationships shaped by these rules (Code, 1991). Trans people threaten binary

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<sup>209</sup>Much like the backlash to women's enfranchisement and other specific gendered gains based on feminist movements (Binard, 2014). These events heralded the possibility of broader changes in society and were poorly received by those who anticipated a loss of power from social changes (Walby, 1997).

cisgenderism but are also a threat of further disruption. Illuminating power dynamics can be threatening to the dominant system by exposing the machinations of enforcement which are meant to appear natural (Bhavnani, 1993; Connell, 1990; Davis, 2017). Feminist theory is a lens through which to see the far-reaching consequences of individual youth stepping out of line with conventions of gender (Tam & Hines, 2010), challenging their own and others' conceptions of the stability of other accepted categories.

### **Intersectionality Theory**

As described in the theory section, intersectionality theory (insofar as it is used in this dissertation) is “an insistence on examining the dynamics of difference and sameness” (Cho et al., 2013, p. 787). This perspective highlights how those with a shared identity (in this case, a minoritized gender identity) can hold a multiplicity of experiences.

The outcomes of this dissertation showing a significant difference between many of the experiences of trans students and cisgender students (including LGB cisgender students). Intersectionality theory provides a caution for the inclination to conclude transgender students' experiences are too similar.

The literature (Allen et al., 2020; Davy & Cordoba, 2020; Eisenberg et al., 2018; Hatchel et al., 2019b; Peter et al., 2021; Seelman, 2014; Taylor & Peter, 2011a; Ullman, 2022) shows that among trans youth, gender identity and experiences vary widely and are affected by other aspects of identity (e.g., race, sexuality). There are two points to consider in light of intersectionality theory. First, how do the lower scores of trans students (on safety, belonging and well-being) compared to peers represent the various other axes of identity and privilege

students hold? Second, how can we interpret the results of the comparison between racialized and non-racialized trans students?

First, the lower scores of trans students must be considered with reference to other identities which are common targets of discrimination. For example, race. White trans youth may face less discrimination than other groups (Cho et al., 2013), consistent with the findings of intersectionality theorists who find race shapes or sharpens discrimination (Christensen & Jensen, 2012; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). This does not mean this dissertation intends to minimize or dismiss the impact of discrimination directed at White trans youth (who may also be affected by other axes of marginalization). However, it does mean that the prevalence of White youth in the group of trans students must be interpreted with a consciousness of the effect their racial privilege could have in their experiences.

While attitudes have been changing in Canada (Peter et al., 2021) racial identity still significantly impacts school experiences (Codjoe, 2001; Matuk & Ruggirello, 2007; Okoye et al., 2023; Ruck & Wortley, 2002). Racial discrimination, particularly toward Indigenous (Vanner & Almanssori, 2024), Black (Okoye et al., 2023) and Asian (Bablak et al., 2016) people, still influences the treatment of students in Canadian schools (Codjoe, 2001; Ruck & Wortley, 2002). There is likely to be gendered discrimination (e.g., transphobia) differentially directed against trans students who are racialized, which other students and/or staff who do not share their racial identity may not be aware of (Carbado & Harris, 2019; Crenshaw, 1989). It was not possible to do in-depth comparisons to examine what this would look like for students of different racial backgrounds. However, this is still critical context in which to interpret the research which can be conducted with limited populations (like trans communities).

Being a trans student still has a big impact on school experiences, but this does not divest trans students of the complexity of other aspects of identity. Intersectionality theory contextualizes the expectations of gendered appearance and behaviour held by society across individual lives.<sup>210</sup> This context suggests that in interpreting the outcome of the analyses comparing racialized and non-racialized students, there should be caution in accepting the idea that students of all races had similar experiences. Despite the nonsignificant outcome of the comparison, the literature and theory both provide strong support for the likelihood of differential treatment that would affect safety, well-being, and belonging (API Equality Northern California, 2020; Lerner & Lee, 2022; Snorton, 2017; Suen et al., 2020; Tan et al., 2022; Tan & Weisbart, 2023; Thai et al., 2021; Ueng-McHale, 2024; Whitfield et al., 2014). A difference might become visible in analyses if there were a larger and more distinct group of racialized trans students available for comparison.

There is also the possibility of diverse experiences of racialization obstructing the effects of one another in the data. The definition of racialization used for this dissertation was broad due to how the questions about race were asked and the complexity of racialization as a concept.<sup>211</sup> Indigenous, Black and Asian peoples living in Turtle Island ('North America') are affected by a long history of discrimination whose consequences affect all the people living in the part called Canada today. Measures created by Indigenous, Black and Indigenous researchers (or with the contemporary assistance of youth who share those identities) would

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<sup>210</sup>Positioning it relative to race and other categories that distinguish social views and patterns of behaviour (for pertinent examples see Ellis et al., 2018; Robinson, 2018; Tan & Weisbart, 2023). There is overlap with feminist theory as well which emphasizes context and the confluences of identity (hooks, 1989, 2000b).

<sup>211</sup>For example, how colorism and other aspects of appearance can differentially affect racism toward people of similar racial heritage (Dixon & Telles, 2017).

have a better chance of capturing those students' experiences authentically. For this reason, while these collected data and analysis show no differences on the reported measures (of safety, security and well-being), intersectionality theory<sup>212</sup> strongly suggests that those differences may exist in a way that the measures do not capture.

This distinction is important because of the precedent of different treatment for racialized trans people. However, examining the nature of the racialized identity grouping and the diversity within is also a good reminder that trans students are not a monolith. Already within the group of gender identities<sup>213</sup> conceptualized here as 'trans' there is a variety of identities.<sup>214</sup> Their needs are likely to be too varied for a single-factor approach to support directed at gender identity. Intersectionality theory provides the framework to understand that supports educated on only trans identity and gender diversity might fail youth whose transphobia is filtered by racialized discrimination, or whose experience of their gender is sharply impacted by disability.

Training for care professionals (e.g., counselors) may need to shift toward how privilege is organized in the world (Case & Amand, 2014; Ieva et al., 2022; Ristock, 2001). A space in which the ideas of acknowledgement and allyship for different identities is acknowledged to be dynamic and require individual insight. Many trans students who are advocates and activists on their own behalf may be able to provide insights on what is needed (e.g., McBride & Neary,

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<sup>212</sup>As well as the literature on trans people and racialization (API Equality Northern California, 2020; Lerner & Lee, 2022; Snorton, 2017; Suen et al., 2020; Tan et al., 2022; Tan & Weisbart, 2023; Thai et al., 2021; Ueng-McHale, 2024; Whitfield et al., 2014).

<sup>213</sup>See previous sections for the gender options offered in the First and Second School Climate Surveys.

<sup>214</sup>Trans girls and boys may have differential experiences compared to each other, but also to nonbinary youth (Allen et al., 2020; Darwin, 2020; Dixon et al., 2022; Lefevor et al., 2019; Lerner & Lee, 2022). Two-spirit youth and other youth with identities which overlap gender and culture may similarly have different experiences (Cameron, 2005; Epple, 1998; Meyercook & Labelle, 2004; Morrison et al., 2019).

2021; Peter et al., 2021; Taube & Mussap, 2020; Taylor et al., 2020; Ullman, 2022). This is also important because the needs of trans students will be a generation separate from those who intend to support them. They may chafe at adult interventions which attempt to dictate their needs to them.

Beyond protecting trans students, intersectionality will be a significant factor in increasing school belonging for trans students. There are four main points this affects in interpretation of results. (1) Any intervention which attempts to support trans students must treat them as a complex group whose lack of belonging is shaped by more than just their gender identity. (2) Interventions to promote school belonging which aim to be welcoming to all possible marginalized identities will inevitably fall short. (3) Any intervention to promote school belonging for trans students is obligated to serve the diverse needs of all students.<sup>215</sup> (4) The most effective intersectional method to foster school belonging for trans students will employ a discursive dialectic understanding of intersectionality.<sup>216</sup>

Expanding the critical perspectives on gender and other axes of societal power could benefit cisgender students (Davis, 2018). In the interpretation of the results, it forestalls any efforts to address the inequalities which would still group them by gender only.<sup>217</sup> Trans students must be each seen as a whole person whose overlapping intersections of identity shape the reception of their transness, and vice versa.

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<sup>215</sup>And if aimed "only at gender" will be likely to reflect the needs of trans students who otherwise possess privileged identities (Carbado & Harris, 2019; Spelman, 1988).

<sup>216</sup>To allow the students to provide insight into what they need to feel belonging and provide education to teachers and advocates on their needs (in the process of collaboration).

<sup>217</sup>As if this were separate from their other identities and experiences, which it is not (Crenshaw, 1991).

The diversity of human life demands an intersectional approach if there is to be any effective support for trans students (Brettschneider et al., 2017; Brickell, 2006) and/or other complex identities. Accepting trans students' personhood as part of the school community calls for acknowledgement of their unique position.<sup>218</sup>

### **Queer Theory**

Queer theories elucidate many of the influences of power in the world by laying bare the normative expectations of social roles and location (Butler, 1990, 1993; Hesse-Biber, 2012b) as one option within a world which offers myriad options. This begins with "deploying the perspective of sexual minorities and denounce[ing] as arbitrary, illegal and intolerable the very regime that produces them as minoritarian in the first place" (Bernini, 2021, p. 48). In this dissertation, that can be applied to trans students (gender minorities). Queer theory posits that trans youth are only constructed as minorities by the restrictions of the same regime that imposes cisgender binary rules on society (Butler, 1993). Queer theory also highlights how threatening it can be to raise questions about the naturalization of these categories, which raises the possibility of dismantling these rules and restrictions (Butler, 1990; Kruger & Richter, 2018; McCann, 2016; O'Shea, 2020; Sullivan, 2003). Some of these overlap with the feminist perspectives on challenging the innate nature of sex and sex roles (de Beauvoir, 1953)<sup>219</sup> and how troubling the accepted system of gender in society disrupts the status quo in far-reaching ways.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>218</sup>In which their transness and how it is received by the school population is shaped by their other identities as well.

<sup>219</sup>As referred to at the time these ideas arose in theoretical writing.

<sup>220</sup>Elements addressed in the previous section on feminist theory will not be repeated here.

Queer theory bears some similarity to feminist and intersectional perspectives which work to identify mechanisms of power.<sup>221</sup> However, queer theory centres on a more radical divestment of traditional social organizations thought and pushes for queering normative and non-normative categories. For example, the consideration of how the imagined divisions between these groups already reflect a deeper acceptance of normative power (Halperin, 2003). Cisgender and trans as comparative groups assumes more difference and distinction than many genuinely exist between the groups. Particularly as there are consequences for recognizing yourself as trans, nonbinary, or otherwise not gender normative (for example, Asakura, 2019; Fish et al., 2020; Katz-Wise et al., 2016). Queer theory prompts a consideration of the normative power dictating that simplified groupings exist at all (Browne & Nash, 2010; Valocchi, 2005). What makes these groups less safe or more separate could easily influence internal considerations in the whole of the student body about whether they would accept a deviation from prescriptions of gender within themselves. This suggests two questions which are to some degree at odds. How big is the group of trans students in reality?<sup>222</sup> Or alternatively, is there such a thing as a group of trans (and other minoritized genders) students and a separate group of cisgender students?

For the latter question, there should be consideration of the complexity of gender. How is gender performed (Butler, 1990) and reinscribed (Ahmed, 2006a)? As well as pushed in all

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<sup>221</sup>Queer theory is interested in exploring the nature of minoritization, mistreatment, and expectations related to gender and sexuality (Ahmed, 2006a; Bernini, 2021; Cyd Cipolla et al., 2017; Krane, 2001; Seidman, 1995, 1996).

<sup>222</sup>Accounting for people who may choose not to align themselves with minoritized genders, and also for recognitions of diversity within oneself when the well-trodden path of binary cisgender identity is so prominent (Ahmed, 2006b).

directions in a pool of adolescents who are learning about the world and themselves (Taylor et al., 2020; Veale et al., 2015), with gender only one facet of that experience.

Trans students' belonging might be improved by efforts to break down the rigid categories of social division (Meyer et al., 2016; Mikulec & Miller, 2017) actively reinforced by current teachings (Casper et al., 2022).<sup>223</sup> Education spaces have previously explored destabilizing legitimate categories and how they are constructed (Copeland, 2005; Sullivan, 2003).<sup>224</sup> It may be of benefit students' critical thinking to be taught to question the idea of rigid pre-existing categories, and question their necessity (Ahmed, 2006b; Butler, 1993; Sedgwick, 1990). This also calls attention to the common epistemological narrative that knowledge must be decided on and enshrined by (cisgender) adult society (Wall, 2014). This perspective is maintained in schools (and society) even when evidence or individual experience exist to contradict its' accuracy (Casper et al., 2022; Rad et al., 2019). Learning to examine the assumptions baked into social and cultural interactions could be valuable to students' development.

This is a natural complement to the recognition of different perspectives promoted by feminist theory ('standpoint feminism;' hooks, 2000b) and intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991). The former calls for consideration of which positions of identity in society can see the true machinations of society most effectively. The latter examines how these identity positions affect each other (as well as each depending on and co-producing the other). Queer theory

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<sup>223</sup>Not only for gender, but for other social normativities.

<sup>224</sup>Performing legitimacy, enacted and re-enacted until it holds the weight of truth (Butler, 1990).

questions the validity and legitimacy of these categories, as well as who is served by their existence and maintenance (Somerville, 2010; Sullivan, 2003).

Taken one step further, the act of acknowledging identity, social categories and the artificiality of their existence (and effects) inherently queers the mainstream Canadian narrative. This narrative relies heavily on pretensions to equality and meritocracy (Crozier, 2018; Duru-Bellat & Tenret, 2012; Price, 2011, 2013). This despite contradictory evidence from the history of 2SLGBTQIA+ Canadians (CBC News, 2012; Nash & Browne, 2021), colonialism (Hutcheon & Lashewicz, 2020; Lugones, 2020), racism (Douglas, 2020; Hickling-Hudson, 2006) and other aspects of society. Queer theory brings probing questions to the position of people relative to others in society, and what we are defining ourselves in orientation to as reference (Ahmed, 2006b). All the categories used to divide power in Canadian society rely on history and context to give them legitimacy. Questioning legitimacy of established systems of power is inherent in questioning whether the categories used to divide power and privilege truly exist (and why).

Expanding the critical perspectives on gender and other axes of societal power could benefit cisgender students (Davis, 2018) by unsettling the status quo. A status quo which encourages the unreflective rote acceptance of themselves as a cipher for the dominant ideas of gender (Butler, 1993) among other performances of identity. The use of queer theory queers the goals of this work, by demanding solutions which do not rely on rote categories but are dynamic and active.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>225</sup>Which differ in particular from traditional solutions focused on the management of the disadvantaged or "problem" group.

This also suggests a different perspective on results than that prompted by the other theories. Rather than help trans students to obtain the same treatment<sup>226</sup> as their peers, queer theory suggests rejecting the idea they are a separate group from their peers. Trans students might be better served by a school environment whose understanding of gender is not predicated on a distinctive majority/minority division of gender. This approach to gender still allows a population to construct itself as separate groups that can be positioned as 'normal or average' compared to 'unusual and other' (Butler, 1990).

This idea should be taken in consideration with the reasonable steps which schools will take but could be incorporated into solutions to some extent. Schools would need more staff, more support for social justice promotion<sup>227</sup> to empower staff to genuinely advance new approaches (Bemak & Chung, 2008). Schools would also need a radical re-centering of power. Adults engaging in critical discourse with students cannot rely on the ideas of epistemology held solely by the former (Kwon, 2013; Liou & Literat, 2020; Maher & Earl, 2021; Stone, 2021).

Ideas of gender are not static and evolve in their relative position to other aspects of the world (Ahmed, 2006b; Bernini, 2021) and with new generations of youth (Thoreson et al., 2018). Ideas centered around a deconstruction of these groups would require more time, education and commitment than might be feasible from institutions which are slow to change. Divesting school authorities and cisgender student bodies of the power of rigid universalized cisgender narratives (Kearns et al., 2017; Logie et al., 2019) is a more threatening idea than the idea of protecting a marginalized group (e.g., trans students). However, accepting the

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<sup>226</sup>Safety, well-being and belonging.

<sup>227</sup>Promotion which would require protection from retaliatory actions by school authorities (Ieva et al., 2022).

construction of discrete gender groups plays into the hierarchical ideas of gender and gender expression.<sup>228</sup> It is worth considering informing policy and protections which are relatively traditional with aspects of this opposition to hierarchy.

Queer theory establishes then that it is not possible to address the outcomes of this dissertation by helping and protecting trans students, but rather by creating the conditions in which trans students cannot be positioned as gender failures by tearing down the pretensions to gender success (Butler, 1993). However, it is likely Canadian society, and Canadian schools, would be reluctant to surrender any of this power (DeGagne, 2021). Schools may actively resist this type of change (Martino et al., 2022a; Martino et al., 2022b). This approach would unearth unsettling truths about gender and other axes of power and identity among those in charge of schools (safety, wellbeing, and belonging). This makes a solution centred around queer theory and the questioning of gender conceptions less likely. But perhaps the only solution which, if successful,<sup>229</sup> would not easily be retrenched.

### **Limitations**

This dissertation provides an opportunity to compare measures between groups for whom there is often too little data for comparison. The data is drawn from a longer survey which examines many aspects of students' life and experiences, which means the variables used in these analyses are not examined in-depth (as would be possible with qualitative methods, for example). The scales used are reliable but measure complex concepts. Other

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<sup>228</sup>Where some forms of gender will inevitably gain ground while others become examples of gender failure (Butler, 1990).

<sup>229</sup>If categories (such as gender) could be successfully challenged to highlight the artificiality of the hierarchies imposed there and elsewhere.

studies might choose to examine solely one of these concepts to capture it with more specific detail. The insight these analyses provide should thus be considered in context.

In terms of the analyses overall, there are limitations of the data. This is not a probability sample; that is, students were not randomly selected to complete the survey. Therefore, the dataset cannot be assumed to represent the views of all students across Canada. The sample is large and robust and is reasonably generalizable based on the specific demographics included. However, there are limitations in the sample demographic which prevent fully representing the experiences of some groups, and which preclude an intersectional analysis to some degree.

The experiences that varied for participants based on race,<sup>230</sup> religion,<sup>231</sup> or birthplace<sup>232</sup> were difficult to capture. The experiences of all students in Canada are shaped by complex intersections of identities which hold more or less privilege respectively. Put another way, those identities which hold privilege (e.g., being white, able-bodied) can be less visible an influence on experience than those identities which marginalize.<sup>233</sup>

Preserving the anonymity of the data means it is more difficult to provide a picture of those identities that form a small proportion of the data. In addition, school districts decided whether their school would participate (self-selection bias). Schools may have chosen to participate who have prioritized trans rights. Districts who did not agree to participate might

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<sup>230</sup>Most participants were white.

<sup>231</sup>Few religious demographics participated in large enough numbers to allow comparisons.

<sup>232</sup>Most participants were born in Canada.

<sup>233</sup>E.g., being disabled in an environment designed for able-bodied people.

have chosen to avoid participation if they felt their school's treatment of trans students would reflect poorly on the school.

Finally, the data is drawn from youth who are attending Canadian schools; specifically, it is more likely to capture the experiences of people who are regularly attending school. If trans students are avoiding school (or have dropped out) due to lack of safety and connection apparent in the analyses, their experiences are less likely to appear. Therefore, it is possible that these results suggest a more positive experience than the overall population of trans students have had.

### **Safety**

The items on the scale for safety span a broad group (ranging from trans people to students who have LGBTQ\* [sic]<sup>234</sup> relatives), and that the scale does not explore or define concepts of safety in-depth. For example, there is no definition of 'safe' given for the questions of the safety scale on whether the respondent's school is 'safe' for certain groups (e.g., LGBTQ\* people and their relatives).

The full scale of perceived safety includes items for the perceived safety of LGBTQ\* people (minoritized sexualities) as well as people who have LGBTQ\* family but are not LGBTQ\* themselves. Social acceptance and understanding differs for gender and sexual minorities (Loutzenheiser, 2015). Correspondingly the scale may reflect more safety for the latter (and/or for people whose relatives are LGBTQ\* but who are not LGBTQ\* themselves).

This scale as a measure of perceived safety might reflect a higher rating of safety than a more specific scale exploring safety for only LGBTQ\* students or separating sexual minorities

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<sup>234</sup>See Footnote 53.

and gender minorities (Taylor et al., 2020). The lower mean for the scale items referring to trans students supports the idea that scales divided by specific LGBTQ\* identities would find lower perceived safety specifically for trans students.

Being safe might include an assurance of safety from physical harm, but also safety from verbal abuse, acts of harassment, and casual discrimination in the environment (e.g., use of slurs). As safety is not defined in this scale, the use of the outcome variable is limited and must be carefully interpreted in reference to the context in which it was asked. The School Climate Surveys must balance the number and complexity of questions against the attention span and reading comprehension of those who contribute.

In this dissertation, the safety measure is discussed with the limitations of how it is asked in mind. Though they do not represent a deep and closely defined definition of what safety is, the measure represents the ratings students gave for what they define as safety. Safety is the minimum that students in Canadian schools should be provided, and the opinion respondents gave on this is interpreted in the results with the weight and respect it deserves. Other questions about areas of safety (e.g., bathrooms, stairwells), experiences of verbal abuse and hearing slurs are used to provide context for this measure and balance the limitations.

### **School Connectedness**

Limitations on school connectedness include the depth of questions as well, as there is a variety of activities which could make a student feel connected to their school. This can reflect abilities and interest as well as the resources available to the individual school and what activities or resources are offered. Because the school climate survey is based on student responses, it is not possible to control for the income of the area in which the school is situated,

the number of activities offered, or the resources available within the school (e.g., clubs, spaces for recreation). These are questions adults or administrators could answer, and which might account for some of the variability in school connectedness.

However, even if these measures were present, a major confound for examining school connectedness as a specific concept is that the experience of trans students relative to their school must necessarily be influenced by the lack of safety and the regularity of anti-2SLGBTQIA+ language around them. Until all students have a safe and respectful school environment, it will be difficult to examine their school connectedness in a way which can be interpreted solely as a measure of the school culture, activities and relationships.

### **Well-being**

There are limitations in how measures of well-being can be interpreted in these analyses because there are many factors which can affect well-being (e.g. family, culture, income). Interpretations of well-being in this dissertation focus on those which can be linked to the differences in students' experiences based on gender and provide a basis for useful changes in school environments.

There are limits to the interpretation of well-being in terms of trans students' likelihood to thrive, because the use of well-being as a measure in this dissertation is primarily comparative. Other groups (LGBQ\* youth, cis het youth) did not necessarily have high mean scores of well-being. Well-being is also a complex concept holistically connected to students' lives (Smith et al., 2019) and it cannot be examined in isolation. Because students spend a significant amount of their time at school (and derive much of their social group from their school peers) it is a valuable measure for how school environments affect students. However,

the influence of school should not be overestimated. Nor should well-being be conceptually separated from independent influences such as home life, health, puberty, and other factors.

### **Racialization**

Most participants in the Second School Climate Survey reported only a white racial identity. It is possible that with a larger sample of racialized trans youth, differences in experiences might be visible. Racialization was very broadly defined for the purposes of these analyses as any student who reported a racial/ethnic identity other than white, or in addition to white. The results of the comparison for research question two might have shown no differences between racialized and non-racialized groups because there were some students grouped as racialized whose identities were not stigmatized in their school environment, whose identities were not known to their peers unless intentionally disclosed, or whose identities were not targeted for abuse due to shadeism and/or other complexities of the often hierarchical nature of racial discrimination (Snorton, 2017; Ware et al., 2020; Whitfield et al., 2014).

It would have been difficult in the National School Climate Survey<sup>235</sup> to include an explanation of racialization, shadeism and discrimination specific enough for students to situate themselves as potential targets of racial discrimination. It would not be appropriate for researchers to judge after the fact which students might be subject to racial discrimination.

This limitation is another which is justified by the scope of the survey and the ages and relative understanding of the respondents. Racialization and other demographic factors are

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<sup>235</sup>Which examined homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in addition to measuring school experiences and demographics to contextualize the results.

included to the extent that they provide possible insights into general differences of experience. However, while measured without a larger sample, it is also possible that differences between specific racialized groups on the outcome measures might be obscured.<sup>236</sup>

The differences documented in the literature which suggest comparing groups based on racialization provide a strong basis for future comparative studies.

### **Comparative Analyses**

The limitations which affect this research question are more complex than those in previous sections, because there is a significant change in the visibility of Canada's culture and environment in the Second School Climate Survey compared to the First. Students in 2019/20 have an enormous amount of access to information via online materials (Boyd, 2013) and may communicate with each other more about their experiences than previous generations. It is possible that their perception of school safety is formed not only from the experiences of themselves and their own close social networks, but also a broader idea of how trans people are treated in the world (Lincoln & Robards, 2017; McConnell et al., 2017; Verbeij et al., 2021).

In addition, this comparison spans a period where there has been enormous political focus on minorized gender people and attempted retrenchment of the rights which have been won (Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity, 2018; CBC News, 2012; Gentile et al., 2017; Nash & Browne, 2021). The administration of Canadian public schools would not be able to prevent this influencing the sense of safety and connection young gender minority people

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<sup>236</sup>If they differed in positive and negative directions respectively and effectively canceled each other out when grouped together.

feel. Even if the schools themselves were entirely supportive spaces.<sup>237</sup> There were genuine efforts to create change following the results of the First School Climate Survey (see Peter et al., 2021 for a description of some of these efforts). However, there are limits on how the effectiveness of these efforts can be examined in the analyses of this dissertation, because the comparison between years is also influenced by the very visible political and cultural climate around gender equality.

There are also limitations in the comparison of trans, nonbinary and gender diverse students between the First and Second School Climate Surveys based on the options for gender offered in each survey. The options offered for gender identities significantly expanded by the Second School Climate Survey. This may have resulted in more trans students visible in the dataset because they saw an option which fit them in the survey. Correspondingly, the group within the data likely spanned a more representative range of experiences. In addition, it is possible that a greater awareness of trans identities, and/or factors such as the visibility of trans peoples' legal protections increasing by the Second School Climate Survey, could have resulted in a greater number of students being comfortable disclosing their trans identity and talking about the violence they face. While this would result in increased documentation of the negative outcomes trans students face, it would be a positive reflection of the perceived trustworthiness of research such as the School Climate Surveys and/or its importance and potential to create change.

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<sup>237</sup>The analyses for both years of the School Climate Survey show schools are far from supportive spaces for most trans students.

Finally, there are limitations to how representative these datasets are of the experiences of Canadian minors who are trans. School districts decided whether their school would participate, and a self-selection bias is likely present to some extent in both datasets. For example, certain schools<sup>238</sup> were also prevented from participating by the decisions of their religious governing councils (Taylor & Peter, 2011a).

Neither dataset is a probability sample, though both are large and robust. However, the dataset is drawn from youth who are attending Canadian schools and specifically does not reflect the needs of trans youth who are not attending school. It is possible that some of the difficulties documented in these analyses (for example, a lack of safety) could lead youth to avoid or drop out of school, and their experiences are naturally less likely to be captured in the datasets.

### **Future Research**

Future research should focus on trans students with mixed-methods wherever possible, because these students are a fascinating and complicated community (Dixon et al., 2022). It would be a disservice to them not to provide a space in which they can independently air their views. Hopefully, unencumbered by the expectations of researchers who are largely not part of their age group and generation. However, it will continue to be valuable to have these broad-scale surveys to allow comparison to other groups as well as collective measures which can be used to inform policy decisions.

Future research should employ specific and detailed questions where possible, even in quantitative survey research. This is the only way to effectively document the intersecting axes

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<sup>238</sup>E.g., Catholic schools.

of identity which color the experiences of trans people. While a long survey such as the School Climate Survey could not justify employing extremely detailed questions about racialization, for example, surveys specifically targeting trans youth could consider which identity questions will be most likely to affect analyses and provide more detailed questions accordingly.

In addition, wherever possible, trans youth from the same generation as the intended participants should be employed to examine the language of the survey and the scope and direction of the questions. While surveys specific to a certain environment can anticipate some issues (e.g., bathroom safety), it is extremely likely that there are issues and questions which adult researchers are simply unable to perceive. There is also the concern that language pertaining to gender, identity, and many other topics can change quickly. There is reason to believe that trans youth are sensitive to these complexities (Schey, 2022; Sharma, 2006; Winters et al., 2018).

Students' safety, school belonging, and well-being are important, and this dissertation is not the first work to find that trans youth differ from their peers on these outcomes. However, the analyses of this first research question have clearly shown that trans students' experiences are significantly different from all their cisgender peers, including LGB+ peers. One major use of this dissertation should be to provide justification to separate the analyses of trans people and LGBQ+ people among vulnerable populations such as youth.

The direction of future research should be on which consequences can be most effectively imposed on Canadian schools to force them to honor the human rights of trans students. Despite significant recent efforts in providing support for 2SLGBTQIA+ students in Canada (e.g., Peter et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2016b), many regions are still

working limit their rights. The provincial government in Saskatchewan, among other jurisdictions, has invested significant effort to prevent trans students from having their name and pronouns used.<sup>239</sup> There are protests across Canada against simply teaching about the existence of trans people (e.g., SOGI 123 programming). Where protesters do not even accurately know the content of the programming they claim to oppose (Femia, 2023). Trans and nonbinary students are more likely to hear a slur against their community daily in their school than to see the basic existence of their community mentioned in curriculum.

### **Policy Implications**

The results of this dissertation should be used to support initiatives to establish protections for trans students in Canadian schools. At minimum, schools should be safe for all students, from violence in any form.<sup>240</sup> Though previous research has clearly demonstrated the need for effective protections for 2SLGBTQIA+ students, the Second School Climate Survey has shown that any protections implemented have not been effective for trans students. This dissertation should be used to demonstrate the need for separate and specific initiatives to protect trans students. It also highlights the violations of their human rights which are currently taking place in their school environment.

The strongest conclusion of this dissertation is that current policies in place to protect trans people are falling severely short for trans students. Protections on paper<sup>241</sup> have not resulted in dignity and safety for trans students under the care of the state. This was visible to

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<sup>239</sup>An action which required them to specifically override the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and Saskatchewan's Human Rights Code (Simes, 2023).

<sup>240</sup>Verbal, slurs and discriminatory language, sexual harassment, physical harassment, and more.

<sup>241</sup>Such as Bill C-16.

some degree in the reports of the First and Second School Climate Surveys. Policymakers should consider carefully how to create new policies with practical actions to protect students, which will be enforced and monitored. Without such actions, nothing will be done that results in a safer school environment.

Canadian schools still essentially license incorrect information. A simplistic binary of cisgender identities is taught. This binary idea of gender is contradicted by culture, history and the natural variation of humanity (Conlin et al., 2019; Cossman, 2018; Darwin, 2020; Dixon et al., 2022). This failure to teach accurate information is in part made visible by the existence of trans students in their schools. Teaching a simplistic gender binary may be affecting safety. The conflict between what students are taught in school as "true" about gender (Allen et al., 2020; Brettschneider et al., 2017; Brickell, 2006; Casper et al., 2022; Conlin et al., 2019; Darwin, 2020; Dixon et al., 2022; Hammack et al., 2021; Peter et al., 2021; Veale et al., 2015) will inevitably clash with the lives of trans students. This is already something trans students report dealing with (Casper et al., 2022; Rad et al., 2019). Two of the areas rated low for safety provide support for this: washrooms and changerooms (highly gendered spaces). Abuse or victimization can still exist unnoticed within these spaces grouped by gender that have an expectation (by now, incredibly outdated) that youth will act in specific ways based on the sex they are assigned to at birth.

Correcting outdated and politically motivated cissexist curriculum is a direct way to address the risk to trans students. Queering safety by working to make an entire school that

can be safe for them<sup>242</sup> would be a novel approach. In contrast to trying to keep individual students safe in a system that is promoting their erasure, which likely bolsters their loss of safety. Canada cannot keep trans students safe in schools that are trained to dispense cissexist propaganda curriculum that denies their existence.<sup>243</sup>

There is precedent in the Netherlands, where outcomes for trans youth are significantly better than other countries (van der Miesen et al., 2025). Dutch schools include mandatory teacher training in how to support sexual and gender minority youth (Rijksoverheid, 2022). There is also training for students in gender diversity (van der Miesen et al., 2025), all of which may be the cause of the more positive psychosocial outcomes of trans youth in the Netherlands.

The safety of trans students in bathrooms demands the destruction of binary divisions which already provide unsafe spaces for students marginalized in other dimensions of their identity (Wernick et al., 2017). By gendering bathrooms, schools are also providing a tacit acknowledgement for students of the expected (gendered) difference in their behaviour. Trans students often face no good option with binary bathrooms as some cisgender people are uncomfortable regardless of the binary bathroom trans people are told to use (Platt & Milam, 2018). But students harmed by binary bathrooms can include cisgender students whose physical morphology or personal expression may not align with peers' expectations (Davis, 2018). This can be a part of the population whose experiences are often left out of bathroom

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<sup>242</sup>Safe for trans students, and other students who may hold more gender diversity than they are comfortable expressing.

<sup>243</sup>In a country where gender diversity is legally protected (Cossman, 2018; Cossman & Katri, 2017; DeGagne, 2021; Walker, 2020), this is especially inexcusable.

experiences, but who can face aggression in these spaces throughout their lives for example, see experiences described by Sheila Gilhooly (2012). Correcting cissexist rhetoric and removing the unnecessary gendering of spaces such as bathrooms would make schools a more equitable space for all students.

There are many options for change in Canadian schools which provide myriad benefits for all students. Efforts to ensure trans youth feel they belong in their schools should not start and end with personal respect. Respecting pronouns and names, bodies and privacy, are all important. But so is including them in the school landscape on the level of cisgender students (Casper et al., 2022). To be successful, efforts to increase school belonging should make space for the reimagining of the world that trans students are likely to bring to their school spaces. Increased visibility of the intersections of identity and experience among the student body could be a good beginning. It would also help begin a conversation on how school spaces are used. There would likely be backlash to even basic inclusion and visibility (DeGagne, 2021). How backlash is handled (if it were done openly and transparently) would send a message about who is allowed to be present and safe.

Trans students are the focus of this dissertation because of how aggressively they are targeted by their peers (Davy & Cordoba, 2020; Diaz et al., 2010; Hunt et al., 2020; Kjaran & Kristinsdóttir, 2015; Kosciw et al., 2008; Kosciw et al., 2009; McGuire, 2010). However, their needs for safety and well-being also provide insight into the state of schools for all students. The results of this dissertation provide a sobering example of how easy to target a student for

violence.<sup>244</sup> Areas where adults can pursue complaints for mistreatment are still working to adequately address this (Gedro & Mizzi, 2014). Canadians under the age of majority might be harder hit due to their relatively lesser social independence. The extreme vulnerability of all students is the broadest lesson of trans students' lack of safety.

Feminisms espoused by women of color have described the transformative potential of making the world safe for the people most harshly marginalized, where such a world by default becomes free for everyone (Baldwin, 2020). In the example of bathrooms, this premise is supported by findings that other marginalized groups (e.g., cisgender women, people of color) are also positively impacted by egalitarian non-gendered bathrooms (Chaney & Sanchez, 2017). Single stall toilets in open concept, non-gendered washrooms would dispense with private bathroom spaces where there is a fear of gendered violence<sup>245</sup> that conservative cisgender Canadians often cite (Chaney & Sanchez, 2017; Cossman, 2018; Davis, 2018; DeGagne, 2021). Individual changerooms and/or the supervision to ensure appropriate behaviour would significantly limit the harassment opportunities in private school spaces, enhancing safety for a variety of identities. Approaches such as this, which emphasize students both as a collective group of equals and as individual identities rather than gender-grouped, also answer the solutions put forward by intersectionality theory.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Gender is complex. Examining 2SLGBTQIA+ groups together often means that trans experiences are rendered invisible among the LGBTQ+ identities, which make up the majority of

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<sup>244</sup>If they hold a socially marginalized identity that will allow school authorities to ignore their safety concerns with relative impunity (Allen et al., 2020; Browne et al., 2011; Peter et al., 2021; Randolph et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2020; Veale et al., 2015; Wernick et al., 2017).

<sup>245</sup>E.g., "boys" going into "girls" bathrooms.

any 2SLGBTQIA+ population. There is evidence that trans communities' concerns and needs are different than the LGBTQ+ communities (Worthen, 2013). Trans people sometimes receive less attention as a distinct group (Tadlock et al., 2017) and are examined with 2SLGBTQIA+ people as a whole. This is likely due to how small the population of trans people in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2022c), which means they are difficult to reach in sufficient numbers for some types of research. This could be addressed by funding for trans-specific research that allows projects to work with the trans community in-depth.

This dissertation fills an important gap in existing literature by focusing on trans and/or nonbinary youth and other gender diverse students. Caught in a unique position for their school years, trans students' safety is dependent on people not equipped to protect or understand them (Allen et al., 2020; Frohard-Dourlent, 2018; Martino et al., 2022b). Bill C-16 provided the legal precedent for trans people to be treated fairly but has not been taken up in practice (Cossman, 2018; Cossman & Katri, 2017). The implications of this dissertation are that Canadian schools will knowingly allow violence to continue against trans students<sup>246</sup> if the only consequence is those students' loss of safety, belonging and well-being.

The most concerning finding of these analyses is how openly unsafe and unwelcoming Canadian schools are for trans students. This not only has a direct negative impact on the trans students currently attending; it also creates a damaging precedent for a whole generation of students of various identities. When students in the Second School Climate Survey learn that violence against trans people will be allowed in their school (for example, hateful transphobic

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<sup>246</sup>Based on the comparative analyses of the First and Second School Climate Surveys showing no change for the better over a period of ten years.

language is expressed with relative impunity), they form an impression of how the rights of trans people will be protected, which they will eventually take with them when they graduate. The consequences of this environment for trans youth go beyond the years spent in school trying to ignore shouts of "she-male!" as they try to finish their education. The lasting impact of this environment is that it devalues trans students and empowers their abusers.

Trans students who live through this environment are being taught that they are an acceptable target for hate even when supervised and protected by adults. They may leave school harboring internalized transphobia, suicidal thoughts, and other pain (Birkett et al., 2009; Hatchel et al., 2019a; Hatchel et al., 2019b; Veale et al., 2015; Veale et al., 2017a; Veale et al., 2017b).

There are also effects beyond trans students. Cisgender students who matriculate in these schools are learning that trans and nonbinary people are not worthy of respect and are easy to target for discrimination. Whether or not they personally perpetrate violence during their school years, cisgender students in this learning environment are taught a dangerous lesson. When students see vicious transphobia pass unchallenged (Peter et al., 2021; Taylor & Peter, 2011a), they may perceive the lack of response from school authorities as a passive endorsement. They will learn it is socially acceptable to hate trans and nonbinary people, and to act out those feelings. This type of micro-aggression contributes to negative outcomes for trans people (Browne et al., 2011).

As a guide to future research and changes, there are significant positives in the findings of this dissertation (despite the surface appearance of negatives). The main point that should be taken is that all these outcomes should to some extent be changeable. There are numerous

studies on youth of various populations whose lessons of support could be applied here - supportive mentors, positive social connections, curriculum which portrays them in a positive way - these are to some extent tested for youth of various situations to support their general ability to thrive. There needs only to be the appropriate importance and urgency attached to these programs of improvement. Trans youth are diverse, and resourceful, and resilient. They are ready to grasp the supports of their communities (Eisenberg et al., 2018) if such supports are offered.

Surely Canadian schools can find a way to help trans students to feel happy, interested in life, and satisfied with life.<sup>247</sup> Trans people are often researched from the viewpoint of the negatives they face, but trans peoples' lives include positivity, affirmation and joy (Holloway, 2023). Young trans people across the world have had the opportunity for happy and fulfilled lives (Tyni et al., 2025; van der Miesen et al., 2025). Iceland offers guides for schools at various levels on how to support transgender students (Office of Human Rights and Democracy, n.d.). In the Netherlands, trans youth are often protected by school policies, have adequate gender affirming healthcare, and even see positive trans coverage in the media (van der Miesen et al., 2025). In some Canadian provinces, educators support student-led initiatives to support trans students and their specific needs (Frohard-Dourlent, 2018). There are examples of trans youth having happy and productive school years and living as well-adjusted adults. Canada has examples to work from.

Right now, trans students do not have the same safety, well-being and belonging as their peers (Taylor & Peter, 2011b; Veale et al., 2017a) and they do not have the same

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<sup>247</sup>At least to the extent that they do not differ significantly from other student groups.

acceptance in society to look forward to (Boellstorff et al., 2014; Gentile et al., 2017; Nagoshi et al., 2012). But they could. The extent to which they are supported and thriving in school is connected to their potential for success outside of school, and any support that can be offered within an otherwise unsupportive institutions might stand out to a trans student as a glimpse of a more positive future, and hopefully a more accepting future world.

There should be an entirely appropriate urgency to support trans youth. But the alarm has been sounded for years, since the seminal First School Climate Survey. How many more years of discrimination and harm would be required for the Canadian government to prioritize trans students? Calls for legislation to support teachers on 2SLGBTQIA+ issues, school district policies, or more explicit school support for 2SLGBTQIA+ students have been made repeatedly for more than a decade (Peter et al., 2021; Taylor & Peter, 2011a; Taylor et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2016b).

The results of this dissertation may be able to prompt further and more specific research into the needs of the various identities which make up this group, but the facts are clear, and stark: trans youth are being left behind. The environment of Canadian schools is not only lacking in support. It is failing to provide even a safe and neutral space in which to learn. It is important to consider the social, emotional, psychological and physiological development taking place in the school years (Campbell et al., 2022; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2006; Kelleher, 2009; Keyes, 2006). The effect of Canadian schools' neglect of trans students, and failure to even keep them safe, will reverberate throughout the future of trans youth.

The improvements needed would have positive results for more than just trans students. Ensuring students have access to support and care respectful of their individuality,<sup>248</sup> providing evidence-based education,<sup>249</sup> and eradicating anti-2SLGBTQIA+ abuse are all an improvement for schools as a whole.

There is no special treatment needed for trans youth. Their needs simply need to be met on par with their peers. They are entitled to the same chances as other students. The effort to improve resources to reach an environment where they are equal will result in a better, more resourced school environment for all students.

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<sup>248</sup>Trans youth, but also youth of other identities who may need care. As intersectionality theory prompts the consideration that youth with differently advantaged identities face different discrimination, supporting trans youth effectively really means supporting them as people who come from various groups and experiences. Such care would benefit youth of all genders.

<sup>249</sup>E.g., curriculum which includes trans and nonbinary people.

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