



Reimagining Transgender Health Care
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Transgender individuals face many challenges as they affirm their gender identity, and indeed, many health inequalities exist among the transgender population in the United States. Discussion about transgender health often focuses on higher rates of HIV and the transgender population's vulnerability to sex work and violence, yet very few scholarly conversations underscore the unique health care needs facing the transgender community. Studies consistently suggest that transgender people, particularly transgender women of color, are among the most vulnerable populations. They are medically marginalized, and their voices are not well-represented because of limited research.

My honors thesis aims to explore transgender people's unique health care experience and to learn more about the strategies of resilience that transgender individuals use when coping with identity development, stigma, and health inequalities. The research highlights key distinctions between the health care experience and needs of transgender individuals and those of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) community. Using qualitative, semi-structured interviews, I recorded and transcribed interviews, and assessed open-ended responses for salient themes. Rather than provoking the vulnerabilities facing the transgender population, I ensured that the interviews held an uplifting tone because the intention of the research study was to start a scholarly conversation and make a positive, meaningful impact.

Transgender individuals are embracing the challenges of societal stigma and discrimination. A rising beacon of hope and inspiration, college junior Janesuda Sperbund recalls the challenges of obtaining gender-affirming health care needs and the lack of continuity in medically necessary routine health care and screenings. Janesuda reports that the "lack of transgender-specific competency in the medical office" was detrimental for her physical and mental health during her

adolescent years. Janesuda recalls, “I felt so frustrated when the supposedly LGBT-trained physician often tried to shove my questions under the rug.” However, Janesuda praises that her resilience—active utilization of social support and use of ongoing personalized transgender health care—proves beneficial for her health and wellbeing.

While the LGBT community, as an umbrella, provides a social safe haven for the transgender population, transgender people remain medically marginalized. The social grouping of the transgender community with the larger LGB community has resulted in negative, unaddressed health challenges facing the transgender community. Many social determinants of health are unique to transgender individuals, and access to safe, nondiscriminatory, medically necessary health care, including hormone therapy and cross-sex routine screening, is especially important. The transgender population often has delayed health care maintenance screenings because of negative interactions with the health care system, and the substandard clinical care facing the transgender community remains a critical public health concern.

***Janesuda Sperbund has opted-in and consented for publication of her full name in my senior honors thesis and this feature of Penn CURF research summary.